

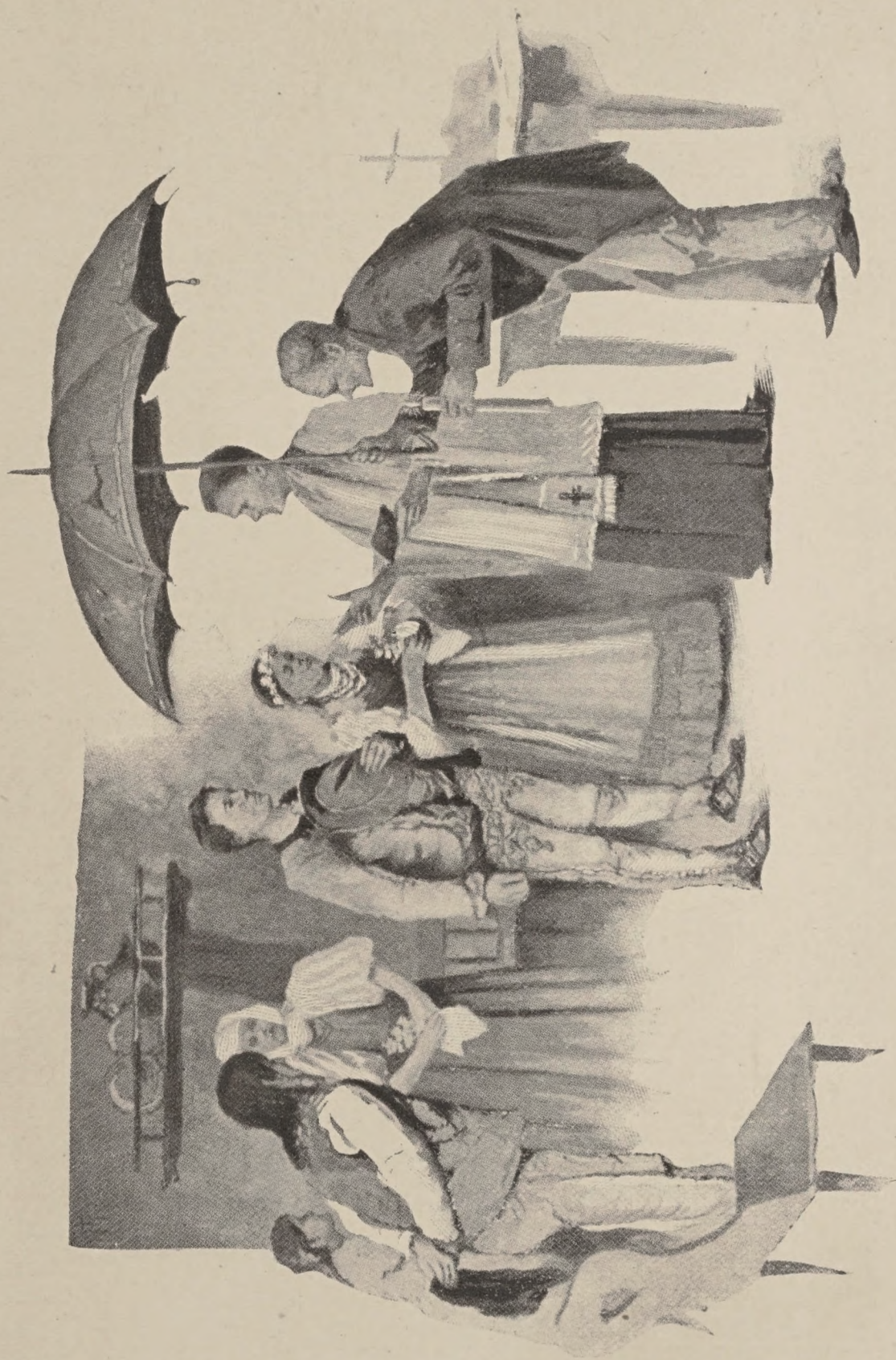


ST. PETER'S UMBRELLA

KÁLMÁN MIKSZÁTH







“JOINED HANDS UNDER THE SACRED UMBRELLA”

St. Peter's Umbrella

Copyright, 1900, by JARROLD & SONS.

All rights reserved.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION,	vii

PART I.—THE LEGEND.

CHAPTER

I. LITTLE VERONICA IS TAKEN AWAY,	3
II. GLOGOVA AS IT USED TO BE,	7
III. THE NEW PRIEST AT GLOGOVA,	11
IV. THE UMBRELLA AND ST. PETER,	25

PART II.—THE GREGORICS FAMILY.

I. THE TACTLESS MEMBER OF THE FAMILY,	49
II. DUBIOUS SIGNS,	63
III. PÁL GREGORICS'S DEATH AND WILL,	77
IV. THE AVARICIOUS GREGORICS,	92

PART III.—TRACES.

I. THE UMBRELLA AGAIN,	123
II. OUR ROSÁLIA,	138
III. THE TRACES LEAD TO GLOGOVA,	144
IV. THE EARRING,	160

INTRODUCTION

KALMAN MIKSZATH, perhaps the most purely national, certainly, after Jókai, the most popular of all the Magyar novelists, was born at Szklabonya, in the county of Nográd, on January 16th, 1849. Educated at Rimaszombáth and Pest, he adopted the legal profession, and settled down as a magistrate in his native county, where his family had for generations lived the placid, patriarchal life of small country squires. A shrewd observer, with a strong satirical bent and an ardent love of letters, the young advocate made his *début* as an author, at the age of twenty-five, with a volume of short stories, which failed, however, to catch the public taste. Shortly afterward he flitted to Szeged, and contributed to the leading periodical there a series of sketches, whose piquant humor and perfection of style attracted so much notice as to encourage a bookseller in the famous city on the Theiss to publish, in 1881, another volume of tales, the epoch-making "Tót

Introduction

Atyafiak," which was followed, four months later, by a supplementary volume, entitled "A jó palócok." Critics of every school instantly hailed these two little volumes as the finished masterpieces of a new and entirely original *genre*, the like of which had hitherto been unknown in Hungary. The short story had, indeed, been previously cultivated, with more or less of success, by earlier Magyar writers; but these first attempts had, for the most part, been imitations of foreign novelists, mere exotics which struck no deep root in the national literature. Mikszáth was the first to study from the life the peculiarities and characteristics of the peasantry among whom he dwelt, the first to produce real, vivid pictures of Magyar folk-life in a series of humoresks, dramas, idylls—call them what you will—of unsurpassable grace and delicacy, seasoned with a pleasantly pungent humor, but never without a sub-flavor of that tender melancholy which lies at the heart of the Hungarian peasantry. And these exquisite miniatures were set in the frame of a lucid, pregnant, virile style, not unworthy of Maupassant or Kjelland. Henceforth Mikszáth was sure of an audience. In 1883 he removed to Pest, and in the following year a fresh series of sketches, "A tisztelt házból," appeared in the columns of the leading Hungarian newspaper, the "Pesti Hírlap," which established his reputation

Introduction

once for all. During the last twelve years Mikszáth has published at least a dozen volumes, and, so far, his productivity shows no sign of exhaustion. The chief literary societies of his native land, including the Hungarian Academy, have all opened their doors to him, and since 1882 he has been twice, unanimously, elected a member of the Hungarian Parliament, in the latter case, oddly enough, representing a constituency vacated by his illustrious compeer and fellow-humorist, Maurus Jókai. Fortunately for literature, he has shown no very remarkable aptitude for politics. When I add that in 1873 Mikszáth married Miss Ilona Mauks, and has two children living, who have frequently figured in his tales, I have said all that need be said of the life-story of this charming and interesting author.

As already implied, the *forte* of Mikszáth is the *conte*, and as a *conteur* he has few equals in modern literature. "A jó palóczok," in particular, has won a world-wide celebrity, and been translated into nearly every European language except English, the greater part of the Swedish version being by the accomplished and versatile pen of King Oscar. But Mikszáth has also essayed the romance with eminent success, and it is one of his best romances that is now presented to the reader. "Szent Péter esernyője," to give it its Magyar title, is a quaintly delightful narrative

Introduction

in a romantic environment of out-of-the-world Slovak villages, with a ragged red Umbrella and a brand-new brass Caldron as the good and evil geniuses of the piece respectively. The Umbrella, which is worth a king's ransom, is sold for a couple of florins to the "white Jew" of the district, becomes the tutelary deity—or shall I say the fetish?—of half a dozen parishes, and is only recovered, after the lapse of years, by its lawful owner, when, by a singular irony of fate, it has become absolutely valueless—from a pecuniary point of view. The Caldron, on the other hand, which is erroneously supposed to contain countless treasures, and is the outcome of a grimly practical joke, proves a regular box of Pandora, and originates a famous lawsuit which lasts ten years and ruins three families—who deserve no better fate. How the Umbrella and the Caldron first come into the story the reader must be left to find out for himself. Suffice it to say that grouped around them are very many pleasant and—by way of piquant contrast—a sprinkling of unpleasant personages, whose adventures and vicissitudes will, I am convinced, supply excellent entertainment to all lovers of fine literature and genuine humor.

R. NISBET BAIN.

The Legend

PART I

CHAPTER I.

LITTLE VERONICA IS TAKEN AWAY.

THE schoolmaster's widow at the Haláp was dead. When a schoolmaster dies there is not much of a funeral, but when his widow follows him, there is still less fuss made. And this one had left nothing but a goat, a goose she had been fattening, and a tiny girl of two years. The goose ought to have been fattened at least a week longer, but the poor woman had not been able to hold out so long. As far as the goose was concerned she had died too soon, for the child it was too late. In fact, she ought never to have been born. It would have been better had the woman died when her husband did. (Dear me, what a splendid voice that man had to be sure!)

The child was born some months after its father's death. The mother was a good, honest woman, but after all it did not seem quite right, for they already had a son, a priest, a very good son on the whole, only it was a pity he could not

St. Peter's Umbrella

help his mother a bit; but he was very poor himself, and lived a long way off in Wallachia, as chaplain to an old priest. But it was said that two weeks ago he had been presented with a living in a small village called Glogova, somewhere in the mountains between Selmeczbánya and Besztercebánya. There was a man in Haláp, János Kapiczány, who had passed there once when he was driving some oxen to a fair, and he said it was a miserable little place.

And now the schoolmaster's widow must needs go and die, just when her son might have been able to help her a little. But no amount of talking would bring her back again, and I must say, for the honor of the inhabitants of Haláp, that they gave the poor soul a very decent funeral.

There was not quite enough money collected to defray the expenses, so they had to sell the goat to make up the sum; but the goose was left, though there was nothing for it to feed on, so it gradually got thinner and thinner, till it was its original size again; and instead of waddling about in the awkward, ungainly way it had done on account of its enormous size, it began to move in a more stately manner; in fact, its life had been saved by the loss of another. God in His wisdom by taking one life often saves another, for, believe me, senseless beings are entered

Little Veronica is Taken Away

in His book as well as sensible ones, and He takes as much care of them as of kings and princes.

The wisdom of God is great, but that of the judge of Haláp was not trifling either. He ordered that after the funeral the little girl (Veronica was her name) was to spend one day at every house in the village in turns, and was to be looked after as one of the family.

“And how long is that to last?” asked one of the villagers.

“Until I deign to give orders to the contrary,” answered the judge shortly. And so things went on for ten days, until Máté Billeghi decided to take his wheat to Besztercebánya to sell, for he had heard that the Jews down that way were not yet so sharp as in the neighborhood of Haláp. This was a good chance for the judge.

“Well,” he said, “if you take your wheat there, you may as well take the child to her brother. Glogova must be somewhere that way.”

“Not a bit of it,” was the answer, “it is in a totally different direction.”

“It *must* be down that way if I wish it,” thundered out the judge.

Billeghi tried to get out of it, saying it was awkward for him, and out of his way. But it was of no use, when the judge ordered a thing, it had to be done. So one Wednesday they put the

St. Peter's Umbrella

sacks of wheat into Billeghi's cart, and on the top of them a basket containing Veronica and the goose, for the latter was, of course, part of the priest's inheritance. The good folks of the village had made shortbread and biscuits for the little orphan to take with her on her journey out into the great world, and they also filled a basket with pears and plums; and as the cart drove off, many of them shed tears for the poor little waif, who had no idea where they were taking her to, but only saw that when the horses began to move, she still kept her place in the basket, and only the houses and trees seemed to move.

CHAPTER II.

GLOGOVA AS IT USED TO BE.

NOT only the worthy Kapiczány had seen Glogova, the writer of these pages has also been there. It is a miserable little place in a narrow valley between bare mountains. There is not a decent road for miles around, much less a railway. Nowadays they say there is some sort of an old-fashioned engine, with a carriage or two attached, which plies between Besztercebánya and Selmecebánya, but even that does not pass near to Glogova. It will take at least five hundred years to bring it up to that pitch of civilization other villages have reached.

The soil is poor, a sort of clay, and very little will grow there except oats and potatoes, and even these have to be coaxed from the ground. A soil like that cannot be spoken of as "Mother Earth," it is more like "Mother-in-law Earth." It is full of pebbles, and has broad cracks here and there, on the borders of which a kind of whitish weed grows, called by the peasants

St. Peter's Umbrella

“orphans' hair.” Is the soil too old? Why, it cannot be older than any other soil, but its strength has been used up more rapidly. Down below in the plain they have been growing nothing but grass for about a thousand years, but up here enormous oak-trees used to grow; so it is no wonder that the soil has lost its strength. Poverty and misery are to be found here, and yet a certain feeling of romance takes possession of one at the sight of it. The ugly peasant huts seem only to heighten the beauty of the enormous rocks which rise above us. It would be a sin to build castles there, which, with their ugly modern towers, would hide those wild-looking rocks.

The perfume of the elder and juniper fills the air, but there are no other flowers, except here and there in one of the tiny gardens, a mallow, which a barefooted, fair-haired Slovak girl tends, and waters from a broken jug. I see the little village before me, as it was in 1873, when I was there last; I see its small houses, the tiny gardens sown partly with clover, partly with maize, with here and there a plum-tree, its branches supported by props. For the fruit-trees at least did their duty, as though they had decided to make up to the poor Slovaks for the poverty of their harvest.

When I was there the priest had just died, and we had to take an inventory of his possessions. There was nothing worth speaking of, a few bits

Glogova as it Used To Be

of furniture, old and well worn, and a few shabby cassocks. But the villagers were sorry to lose the old priest.

“He was a good man,” they said, “but he had no idea of economy, though, after all, he had not very much to economize with.”

“Why don’t you pay your priest better?” we asked. And a big burly peasant answered:

“The priest is not our servant, but the servant of God, and every master must pay his own servant.”

After making the inventory, and while the coachman was harnessing the horses, we walked across the road to have a look at the school, for my companion was very fond of posing as a patron of learning.

The schoolhouse was small and low, with a simple, thatched roof. Only the church had a wooden roof, but even the House of God was very simply built, and there was no tower to it, only a small belfry at one side.

The schoolmaster was waiting for us. If I remember rightly his name was György Majzik. He was a strong, robust-looking man, with an interesting, intelligent face, and a plain, straightforward way of speaking which immediately awoke a feeling of friendship in one. He took us in to see the children; the girls sat on one side, the boys on the other, all as tidy and clean as

St. Peter's Umbrella

possible. They rose on our entrance, and in a singing voice said:

“Vitajtye panyi, vitajtye!” (Good-morning, honored sirs!)

My companion put a few questions to the rosy, round-faced children, who stared at us with their large brown eyes. They all had brown eyes. The questions were, of course, not difficult, but they caused the children an amount of serious thinking. However, my friend was indulgent, and he only patted the schoolmaster on the back and said:

“I am quite contented with their answers, my friend.”

The schoolmaster bowed, then, with his head held high, he accompanied us out to the road.

CHAPTER III.

THE NEW PRIEST AT GLOGOVA.

THE new priest had arrived in the only cart the villagers had at their disposal. Two cows were harnessed to it, and on the way the sacristan stopped to milk them, and then offered some of the milk to the young priest.

“It’s very good milk,” he said, “especially Bimbo’s.”

His reverence’s luggage was not bulky; it consisted of a plain wooden box, a bundle of bed-clothes, two walking-sticks, and some pipes tied together with string. As they passed through the various villages the sacristan was often chaffed by the inhabitants.

“Well,” they called out to him, “couldn’t you find a better conveyance than that for your new priest?”

Whereupon the sacristan tried to justify his fellow-villagers by saying with a contemptuous look at the luggage in the cart:

St. Peter's Umbrella

"It's good enough, I'm sure. Why, a calf a month old could draw those things."

But if he had not brought much with him in the way of worldly goods, János Bélyi did not find much either in his new parish, which appeared to be going to wreck and ruin. The relations of the dead priest had taken away every stick they could lay hands on, and had only left a dog, his favorite. It was a dog such as one sees every day, as far as his shape and coat were concerned, but he was now in a very unpleasant position. After midday he began to wander from house to house in the village, slinking into the kitchens; for his master had been in the habit of dining every day with one or other of his parishioners, and always took his dog with him.

The dog's name was Vistula, but his master need not have gone so far to find the name of a river, when the Bjela Voda flowed right through the meadows outside the village. (The Hungarian peasants generally give their dogs the name of a river, thinking it prevents hydrophobia.) The dog had already begun to feel that he and the priest together had been better received than he alone, though, until now, he had always imagined, with his canine philosophy, that his master had in reality been eating more than his share of the food. But now he saw the difference, for he was driven away from the houses where

The New Priest at Glogova

he had once been an honored guest. So altogether he was in a very miserable, lean condition when the new priest arrived. The sacristan had shown him his new home, with its four bare walls, its garden overgrown with weeds, its empty stable and fowl-house. The poor young man smiled.

“And is that all mine?” he asked.

“All of it, everything you see here,” was the answer, “and this dog too.”

“Whose dog is it?”

“It belonged to the poor dead priest, God rest his soul. We wanted to kill the poor beast, but no one dares to, for they say that the spirit of his old master would come back and haunt us.”

The dog was looking at the young priest in a melancholy, almost tearful way; perhaps the sight of the cassock awoke sad memories in him.

“I will keep him,” said the priest, and stooping down he patted the dog’s lean back. “At all events there will be some living thing near me.”

“That will be quite right,” said the sacristan. “One must make a beginning, though one generally gets something worth watching first, and then looks out for a watch-dog. But it doesn’t matter if it is the other way about.”

János Bélyi smiled (he had a very winning smile, like a girl’s), for he saw that old Vistula would not have much to do, in fact would be quite

St. Peter's Umbrella

like a private gentleman in comparison to his companions.

All this time people had been arriving in the yard to have a look at the new priest; the women kept at a distance, and said: "Dear me! so young and already in holy orders!"

The men went up and shook hands with him, saying, "God bless you! May you be happy with us!"

An old woman called out, "May you be with us till your death!"

The older women admired his looks, and remarked how proud his mother must be of him.

In fact the new priest seemed to have taken every one's fancy, and he spoke a few words with them all, and then said he was tired, and went across to the schoolmaster's, for he was to live there for a time till he could get his own place a bit straight, and until he saw some signs of an income.

Only a few of the more important villagers accompanied him to talk over the state of affairs: Péter Szlávik, the sacristan; Mihály Gongoly, the nabob of Glogova; and the miller, György Klinc-sok. He began to question them, and took out his note-book, in order to make notes as to what his income was likely to be.

"How many inhabitants are there in the village?"

The New Priest at Glogova

"Rather less than five hundred."

"And how much do they pay the priest?"

They began to reckon out how much wood they had to give, how much corn, and how much wine. The young priest looked more and more serious as they went on.

"That is very little," he said sadly. "And what are the fees?"

"Oh, they are large enough," answered Klinc-sok; "at a funeral it depends on the dead person, at a wedding it depends on the people to be married; but they are pretty generous on that occasion as a rule; and at a christening one florin is paid. I'm sure that's enough, isn't it?"

"And how many weddings are there in a year?"

"Oh, that depends on the potato harvest. Plenty of potatoes, plenty of weddings. The harvest decides it; but as a rule there are at least four or five."

"That is not many. And how many deaths occur?"

"That depends on the quality of the potato harvest. If the potatoes are bad, there are many deaths, if they are good, there are less deaths, for we are not such fools as to die then. Of course now and then a falling tree in the woods strikes one or the other dead; or an accident happens to a cart, and the driver is killed. You may reckon

St. Peter's Umbrella

a year with eight deaths a good one as far as you are concerned."

"But they don't all belong to the priest," said the nabob of Glogova, smoothing back his hair.

"Why, how is that?" asked the priest.

"Many of the inhabitants of Glogova are never buried in the cemetery at all. The wolves eat them without ever announcing it in the parish."

"And some die in other parts of the country," went on György Klincsok, "so that only very few of them are buried here."

"It is a bad lookout," said the priest. "But the parish fields, what about them?"

Now they all wanted to speak at once, but Klincsok pulled the sacristan aside, and stood up in front of the priest.

"Fields?" he said. "Why you can have as much ground as you like. If you want one hundred acres . . ."

"One hundred acres!" shouted Szlávik, "five hundred if you like; we shall not refuse our priest any amount of ground he likes to ask for."

The priest's countenance began to clear, but honest Szlávik did not long leave him in doubt.

"The fact is," he began, "the boundaries of the pasture-lands of Glogova are not well defined to this day. There are no proper title-deeds; there was some arrangement made with regard

The New Priest at Glogova

to them, but in 1823 there was a great fire here, and all our documents were burnt. So every one takes as much of the land as he and his family can till. Each man ploughs his own field, and when it is about used up he looks out a fresh bit of land. So half the ground is always unused, of course the worst part, into which it is not worth while putting any work."

"I see," sighed the priest, "and that half belongs to the church."

It was not a very grand lookout, but by degrees he got used to the idea of it, and if unpleasant thoughts would come cropping up, he dispersed them by a prayer. When praying, he was on his own ground, a field which always brought forth fruit; he could reap there at any minute all he was in need of—patience, hope, comfort, content. He set to work to get his house in order, so that he could at least be alone. Luckily he had found in the next village an old school friend, Tamás Urszinyi, a big, broad-shouldered man, plain-spoken, but kind-hearted.

"Glogova is a wretched hole," he said, "but not every place can be the Bishopric of Neutra. However, you will have to put up with it as it is. Daniel was worse off in the lions' den, and after all these are only sheep."

"Which have no wool," remarked his reverence, smiling.

St. Peter's Umbrella

"They have wool, but you have not the shears."

In a few days he had furnished his house with the money he had borrowed of his friend, and one fine autumn afternoon he was able to take possession of his own house. Oh, how delightful it was to arrange things as he liked! What pleasant dreams he would have lying in his own bed, on pillows made by his own mother! He thought over it all when he lay down to sleep, and before going to sleep he counted the corners of the room so as to be sure and remember his dreams. (The Hungarian peasants say, that when you sleep in a room for the first time you must count the corners, then you will remember your dream, which is sure to come true.) He remembered his dream the next morning, and it was a very pleasant one. He was chasing butterflies in the fields outside his native village, looking for birds' nests, playing games with the boys and girls, having a quarrel with Pali Szabó, and they were just coming to blows when some one tapped at the window outside.

The priest awoke and rubbed his eyes. It was morning, the sun was shining into the room.

"Who is it?" he called out.

"Open the door, Jankó!"

Jankó! Who was calling him Jankó? It seemed to him as though it were one of his old

The New Priest at Glogova

schoolfellows, from whom he had just parted in his dream.

He jumped out of bed and ran to the window.

"Who is it?" he repeated.

"It is I," was the answer, "Máté Billeghi from your old home. Come out, Jankó, no, I mean of course, please come out, your reverence. I've brought something."

The priest dressed hastily. His heart was beating fast with a kind of presentiment that he was to hear bad news. He opened the door and stepped out.

"Here I am, Mr. Billeghi; what have you brought me?"

But Mr. Billeghi had left the window and gone back to the cart, where he was unfastening the basket containing little Veronica and the goose. The horses hung their heads, and one of them tried to lie down, but the shaft was in the way, and when he tried the other side, he felt the harness cutting into his side, which reminded him that he was not in the stable, and a horse's honorable feeling will not allow of its lying down, as long as it is harnessed to the cart. There must be something serious the matter to induce it to lie down in harness, for a horse has a high sense of duty.

Máté Billeghi now turned round and saw the priest standing near him.

St. Peter's Umbrella

"Hallo, Jankó! Why, how you have grown! How surprised your mother would be if she were alive! Bother this rope, I did make a firm knot in it!"

The priest took a step toward the cart, where Billeghi was still struggling with the knot. The words, "if your mother were alive," had struck him like a blow, his head began to swim, his legs to tremble.

"Are you speaking of my mother?" he stammered. "Is my mother dead?"

"Yes, poor woman, she has given up the ghost. But" (and here he took out his knife and began to cut the rope) "here is your little sister, Jankó, that is, I mean, your reverence; my memory is as weak as a chicken's, and I always forget whom I am talking to. I've brought your reverence's little sister; where shall I put her down?"

And with that he lifted up the basket in which the child was sleeping soundly with the goose beside her. The bird seemed to be acting the part of nurse to her, driving off the flies which tried to settle on her little red mouth.

The autumn sunlight fell on the basket and the sleeping child, and Máté was standing with his watery blue eyes fixed on the priest's face, waiting for a word or a sign from him.

"Dead!" he murmured after a time. "Impossible. I had no feeling of it." He put his hand

The New Priest at Glogova

to his head, saying sadly, "No one told me, and I was not there at the funeral."

"I was not there either," said Máté, as though that would console the other for his absence; and then added, as an afterthought:

"God Almighty took her to Himself, He called her to His throne. He doesn't leave one of us here. Bother those frogs, now I've trodden on one!"

There were any amount of them in the weedy courtyard of the Presbytery; they came out of the holes in the damp walls of the old church.

"Where shall I put the child?" repeated Mr. Billeghi, but as he received no answer, he deposited her gently on the small veranda.

The priest stood with his eyes fixed on the ground; it seemed to him as though the earth, with the houses and gardens, Máté Billeghi and the basket, were all running away, and only he was standing there, unable to move one way or the other. From the Ukrica woods in the distance there came a rustling of leaves, seeming to bring with it a sound that spoke to his heart, the sound of his mother's voice. He listened, trembling, and trying to distinguish the words. Again they are repeated; what are they?

"János, János, take care of my child!"

But while János was occupied in listening to voices from a better land, Máté was getting tired

St. Peter's Umbrella

of waiting, and muttering something to himself about not getting even a "thank you" for his trouble, he prepared to start.

"Well, if that's the way they do things in these parts, I'll be off," he grumbled, and cracking his whip he added, "Good-by, your reverence. Gee-up, Sármany!"

Father János still gave no answer, did not even notice what was going on around him, and the horses were moving on, Máté Billeghi walking beside them, for they had to go uphill now, and the good man was muttering to himself something about its being the way of the world, and only natural that if a chicken grows into a peacock, of course the peacock does not remember the time when it was a chicken. When he got up to the top of the hill he turned round and saw the priest still standing in the same place, and, making one last effort to attract his attention, he shouted:

"Well, I've given you what I was told to, so good-by."

The priest's senses at last returned from the paths in which they had been wandering, far away, with his mother. In imagination he was kneeling at her death-bed, and with her last breath she was bidding him take care of his little sister.

There was no need for it to be written nor to

The New Priest at Glogova

be telegraphed to him; there were higher forces which communicated the fact to him.

János's first impulse was to run after Máté, and ask him to stop and tell him all about his mother, how she had lived during the last two years, how she had died, how they had buried her, in fact, everything. But the cart was a long way off by now, and, besides, his eyes at that moment caught sight of the basket and its contents, and they took up his whole attention.

His little sister was still asleep in the basket. The young priest had never yet seen the child, for he had not been home since his father's funeral, and she was not born then; so he had only heard of her existence from his mother's letters, and they were always so short. János went up to the basket and looked at the small rosy face. He found it bore a strong resemblance to his mother's, and as he looked the face seemed to grow bigger, and he saw the features of his mother before him; but the vision only lasted a minute, and the child's face was there again. If she would only open her eyes! But they were firmly closed, and the long eyelashes lay like silken fringes on her cheeks.

"And I am to take care of this tiny creature?" thought János. "And I will take care of her. But how am I to do it? I have nothing to live on myself. What shall I do?"

St. Peter's Umbrella

He did as he always had done until now, when he had been in doubt, and turned toward the church in order to say a prayer there. The church was open, and two old women were inside, white-washing the walls. So the priest did not go quite in but knelt down before a crucifix at the entrance.

CHAPTER IV.

THE UMBRELLA AND ST. PETER.

FATHER JANOS remained kneeling a long time and did not notice that a storm was coming up. When he came out of the church it was pouring in torrents, and before long the small mountain streams were so swollen that they came rushing down into the village street, and the cattle in their fright ran lowing into their stables.

János's first thought was that he had left the child on the veranda, and it must be wet through. He ran home as fast as he could, but paused with surprise before the house. The basket was where he had left it, the child was in the basket, and the goose was walking about in the yard. The rain was still coming down in torrents, the veranda was drenched, but on the child not a drop had fallen, for an immense red umbrella had been spread over the basket. It was patched and darned to such an extent that hardly any of the original stuff was left, and the border of flowers round it was all but invisible.

St. Peter's Umbrella

The young priest raised his eyes in gratitude to Heaven, and taking the child into his arms, carried it, under the red umbrella, into his room. The child's eyes were open now; they were a lovely blue, and gazed wonderingly into the priest's face.

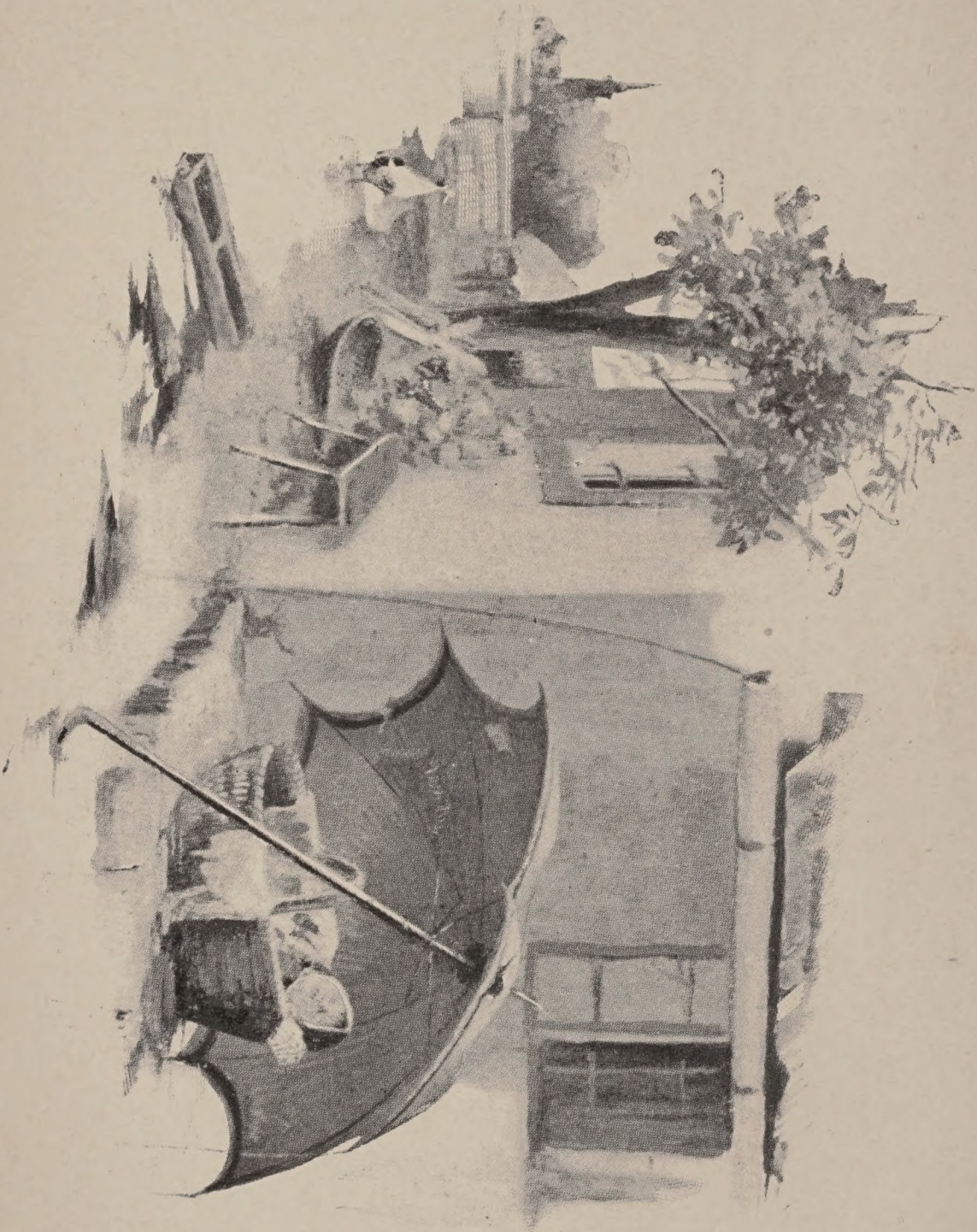
"It is really a blessing," he murmured, "that the child did not get wet through; she might have caught her death of cold, and I could not even have given her dry clothes."

But where had the umbrella come from? It was incomprehensible, for in the whole of Glogova there was not a single umbrella.

In the next yard some peasants were digging holes for the water to run into. His reverence asked them all in turn, had they seen no one with the child? No, they had seen the child, but as far as they knew no one had been near it. Old Widow Adamecz, who had run home from the fields with a shawl over her head, had seen something red and round, which seemed to fall from the clouds right over the child's head. Might she turn to stone that minute if it were not true, and she was sure the Virgin Mary had sent it down from Heaven herself to the poor orphan child.

Widow Adamecz was a regular old gossip; she was fond of a drop of brandy now and then, so it was no wonder she sometimes saw more

“THE CHILD WAS IN THE BASKET”





The Umbrella and St. Peter

than she ought to have done. The summer before, on the eve of the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, she had seen the skies open, and Heaven was before her; she had heard the angels sing, as they passed in procession before God, sitting on a throne of precious stones. And among them she had seen her grandson, János Plachta, in a pretty red waistcoat which she herself had made him shortly before his death. And she had seen many of the inhabitants of Glogova who had died within the last few years, and they were all dressed in the clothes they had been buried in.

You can imagine that after that, when the news of her vision was spread abroad, she was looked upon as a very holy person indeed. All the villagers came to ask if she had seen their dead relations in the procession; this one's daughter, that one's father, and the other one's "poor husband!" They quite understood that such a miracle was more likely to happen to her than to any one else, for a miracle had been worked on her poor dead father András, even though he had been looked upon in life as something of a thief. For when the high road had had to be made broader eight years before, they were obliged to take a bit of the cemetery in order to do it, and when they had opened András's grave, so as to bury him again, they saw with astonishment that he had a long beard, though five

St. Peter's Umbrella

witnesses swore to the fact that at the time of his death he was clean-shaven.

So they were all quite sure that old András was in Heaven, and having been an old cheat all his life he would, of course, manage even up above to leave the door open a bit now and then, so that his dear Agnes could have a peep at what was going on.

But Pál Kvapka, the bell-ringer, had another tale to tell. He said that when he had gone up the belfry to ring the clouds away, and had turned round for a minute, he saw the form of an old Jew crossing the fields beyond the village, and he had in his hands that immense red thing like a plate, which his reverence had found spread over the basket. Kvapka had thought nothing of it at the time, for he was sleepy, and the wind blew the dust in his eyes, but he could take an oath that what he had told them had really taken place. (And Pál Kvapka was a man who always spoke the truth.) Others had also seen the Jew. He was old, tall, gray-haired, his back was bent, and he had a crook in his hand, and when the wind carried his hat away, they saw that he had a large bald place at the back of his head.

“He was just like the picture of St. Peter in the church,” said the sacristan, who had seen him without his hat. “He was like it in every respect,” he repeated, “except that he had no keys in his

The Umbrella and St. Peter

hand." From the meadow he had cut across Stropov's clover-field, where the Krátki's cow, which had somehow got loose, made a rush at him; in order to defend himself he struck at it with his stick (and from that time, you can ask the Krátki family if it is not true, the cow gave fourteen pints of milk a day, whereas they used to have the greatest difficulty in coaxing four pints from it).

At the other end of the village the old man had asked the miller's servant-girl which was the way to Lehota, and Erzsi had told him, upon which he had started on the footpath up the mountains. Erzsi said she was sure, now she came to think of it, that he had a glory round his head.

Why, of course it must have been St. Peter! Why should it not have been? There was a time when he walked about on earth, and there are many stories told still as to all he had done then. And what had happened once could happen again. The wonderful news spread from house to house, that God had sent down from Heaven a sort of red-linen tent, to keep the rain off the priest's little sister, and had chosen St. Peter himself for the mission. Thereupon followed a good time for the child, she became quite the fashion in the village. The old women began to make cakes for her, also milk puddings, and various other delicacies. His reverence had nothing to do but

St. Peter's Umbrella

answer the door all day, and receive from his visitors plates, dishes, or basins wrapped up in clean cloths. The poor young priest could not make out what was going on in his new parish.

“Oh, your reverence, please, I heard your little sister had come, so I've brought her a trifle for her dinner; of course it might be better, but it is the best such poor folks as we can give. Our hearts are good, your reverence, but our flour might be better than it is, for that good-for-nothing miller burned it a bit the last time—at least, that part of it which he did not keep for his own use. May I look at the little angel? They say she's a little beauty.”

Of course his reverence allowed them all to look at her in turn, to pat her and smooth her hair; some of them even kissed her tiny feet.

The priest was obliged to turn away now and then to hide the tears of gratitude. He reproached himself, too, for his hard thoughts of the good villagers. “How I have misjudged them!” he thought to himself. “There are no better people in the world. And how they love the child!”

At tea-time Widow Adamecz appeared on the scene; until now she had not troubled much about the new priest. She considered herself entitled to a word in the management of the ecclesiastical affairs of the village, and based her rights on the

The Umbrella and St. Peter

fact of her father having grown a beard in his grave, which, of course, gave him a place among the saints at once.

"Your reverence," she began, "you will want some one to look after the child."

"Yes, of course, I ought to have some one," he replied, "but the parish is poor, and . . ."

"Nobody is poor but the devil," burst out Widow Adamecz, "and he's poor because he has no soul. But we have souls. And after all, your reverence won't know how to dress and undress a child, nor how to wash it and plait its hair. And then she will often be hungry, and you can't take her across to the schoolmaster's each time. You must have some one to cook at home, your reverence. The sacristan is all very well for sweeping and tidying up a bit, but what does he know about children?"

"True, true; but where am I to . . ."

"Where? And am *I* not here? The Lord created me for a priest's cook, I'm sure."

"Yes, I daresay. But how am I to pay your wages?"

Widow Adamecz put her hands on her hips, and planted herself in front of Father János.

"Never mind about that, your honor. Leave it to God and to me. He will pay me. I shall enter your service this evening, and shall bring all my saucepans and things with me."

St. Peter's Umbrella

The priest was more and more surprised, but even more astonished was his friend Urszinyi when he came over toward evening and the priest related the events of the day, and told him of Widow Adamecz's offer.

"What!" he exclaimed, "Widow Adamecz? That old witch? And without payment? Why, János, a greater miracle never yet happened. An inhabitant of Glogova working for payment from Heaven! You seem to have bewitched the people."

The priest only smiled, but his heart was full of gratitude. He also felt that a miracle had taken place; it was all so strange, so incomprehensible. But he guessed at the cause of the change. The prayer he had said at the entrance to the church had been heard, and this was the answer. Yes, it really was a miracle! He had not heard all the stories that were spread abroad about the red umbrella, and he only smiled at those that had come to his ears. It is true he did not understand himself how the umbrella came to be where he had found it; he was surprised at first, but had not thought any more about it, and had hung it on a nail in his room, so that if the owner asked for it he could have it at once, though it was not really worth sixpence.

But the day's events were not yet done. Toward evening the news spread that the wife of the

The Umbrella and St. Peter

miller, the village nabob, had been drowned in the Bjela Voda, which was very swollen from the amount of rain that had fallen. The unfortunate woman had crossed the stepping-stones in order to bring back her geese, which had strayed to the other side. She had brought back two of them, one under each arm, but as she was re-crossing to fetch the third, her foot slipped, and she fell into the stream. In the morning there had been so little water there, that a goat could have drank it all in half a minute, and by midday it was swollen to such an extent that the poor woman was drowned in it. They looked for her the whole afternoon in the cellar, in the loft, everywhere they could think of, until in the evening her body was taken out of the water near Lehota. There some people recognized her, and a man was sent over on horseback to tell Mihály Gongoly of the accident. All this caused great excitement in the village, and the people stood about in groups, talking of the event.

“Yes, God takes the rich ones too,” they said.

György Klincsok came running in to the priest.

“There will be a grand funeral the day after to-morrow,” he exclaimed.

The sacristan appeared at the schoolmaster's in the hope of a glass of brandy to celebrate the event.

“Collect your thoughts,” he exclaimed, “there

St. Peter's Umbrella

will be a grand funeral, and they will expect some grand verses."

Two days later the funeral took place, and it was a long time since anything so splendid had been seen in Glogova. Mr. Gongoly had sent for the priest from Lehota too, for, as he said, why should not his wife have two priests to read the burial service over her. He sent all the way to Besztercebánya for the coffin, and they took the wooden cross that was to be put at the head of the grave to Kopanyik to have it painted black, with the name and the date of her death in white letters.

There were crowds of people at the funeral in spite of the bad weather, and just as the priest was starting in full canonicals, with all the little choir-boys in their clean surplices, it began to pour again; so Father János turned to Kvapka, the sacristan, and said:

"Run back as fast as you can and fetch the umbrella out of my room."

Kvapka turned and stared; how was he to know what an umbrella was?

"Well," said Father János, "if you like it better, fetch the large, round piece of red linen I found two days ago spread over my little sister."

"Ah, now I understand!"

The priest took shelter in a cottage until the fleet-footed Kvapka returned with the umbrella,

The Umbrella and St. Peter

which his reverence, to the great admiration of the crowd, with one sweeping movement of his hand spread out in such a fashion that it looked like a series of bats' wings fastened together. Then, taking hold of the handle, he raised it so as to cover his head, and walked on with stately step, without getting wet a bit; for the drops fell angrily on the strange tent spread over him, and, not being able to touch his reverence, fell splashing on to the ground. The umbrella was the great attraction for all the peasants at the funeral, and they exchanged many whispered remarks about the (to them) strange thing.

"That's what St. Peter brought," they said.

Only the beautiful verses the schoolmaster had composed for the occasion distracted their attention for a while, and sobs broke forth as the various relations heard their names mentioned in the lines in which the dead woman was supposed to be taking leave of them:

"Good-by, good-by, my dearest friends; Pál Lajkó my brother, György Klincsok my cousin," etc.

The whole of Pál Lajkó's household began to weep bitterly, and Mrs. Klincsok exclaimed rapturously:

"How on earth does he manage to compose such beautiful lines!"

Which exclamation inspired the schoolmaster

St. Peter's Umbrella

with fresh courage, and, raising his voice, he continued haranguing the assembled friends in the dead woman's name, not forgetting a single one, and there was not a dry eye among them.

For some time after they had buried Mrs. Gongoly the grand doings at the funeral were still the talk of the place, and even at the funeral the old women had picked out pretty Anna Tyurek as the successor of Mrs. Gongoly, and felt sure it would not be long before her noted "mentyék" had an owner. (Every well-to-do Slovak peasant buys a long cloak of sheepskin for his wife; it is embroidered outside in bright colors, and inside is the long silky hair of the Hungarian sheep. It is only worn on Sundays and holidays, and is passed on from one generation to another.)

The mourners had hardly recovered from the large quantities of brandy they had imbibed in order to drown their sorrow, when they had to dig a new grave; for János Srankó had followed Mrs. Gongoly. In olden times they had been good friends, before Mrs. Gongoly was engaged; and now it seemed as though they had arranged their departure from this world to take place at the same time.

They found Srankó dead in his bed, the morning after the funeral; he had died of an apoplectic fit. Srankó was a well-to-do man, in fact a

The Umbrella and St. Peter

“mágná.” (The fifteen richest peasants in a Slovak village are called “mágnás” or “magnates.”) He had three hundred sheep grazing in his meadows and several acres of ploughed land, so he ought to have a grand funeral too. And Mrs. Srankó was not idle, for she went herself to the school-master, and then to the priest, and said she wished everything to be as it had been at Mrs. Gongoly’s funeral. Let it cost what it might, but the Srankós were not less than the Gongolys. She wished two priests to read the funeral service, and four choir-boys to attend in their best black cassocks, the bell was to toll all the time, and so on, and so on. Father János nodded his head.

“Very well, all shall be as you wish,” he said, and then proceeded to reckon out what it would cost.

“That’s all right,” said Mrs. Srankó, “but please, your reverence, put the red thing in too, and let us see how much more it will cost.”

“What red thing?”

“Why, what you held over your head at Mrs. Gongoly’s funeral. Oh, it *was* lovely!”

The young priest could not help smiling.

“But that is impossible,” he said.

Mrs. Srankó jumped up, and planted herself before him, with her arms crossed.

“And why is it impossible I should like to

St. Peter's Umbrella

know? My money is as good as the Gongolys', isn't it?"

"But, my dear Mrs. Srankó, it was raining then, and to-morrow we shall in all probability have splendid weather."

But it was no use arguing with the good woman, for she spoke the dialect of the country better than Father János did.

"Raining, was it?" she exclaimed. "Well, all the more reason you should bring it with you to-morrow, your honor; at all events it won't get wet. And, after all, my poor dear husband was worthy of it; he was no worse than Mrs. Gongoly. Every one honored him, and he did a lot for the Church; why, it was he who five years ago sent for those lovely colored candles we have on the altar; they came all the way from Besztercebánya. And the white altar-cloth my husband's sister embroidered. So you see we have a right to the red thing."

"But I can't make myself ridiculous by burying some one with an umbrella held over me when the sun is shining. You must give up the idea, Mrs. Srankó."

Thereupon Mrs. Srankó burst into tears. What had she done to be put to such shame, and to be refused the right to give her husband all the honors due to the dead, and which were a comfort to the living too? What would the villagers

The Umbrella and St. Peter

say of her? They would say, "Mrs. Srankó did not even give her husband a decent funeral, they only threw him into the grave like a beggar."

"Please do it, your reverence," she begged tearfully, and kept on wiping her eyes with her handkerchief, until one of the corners which had been tied in a knot came unfastened, and out fell a ten-florin note. Mrs. Srankó picked it up, and put it carefully on the table.

"I'll give this over and above the other sum," she said, "only let us have all the pomp possible, your honor."

At this moment Widow Adamecz rushed in from the kitchen, flourishing an immense wooden spoon in the air.

"Yes, your reverence, Srankó was a good, pious man; not all the gossip you hear about him is true. And even if it were, it would touch Mrs. Gongoly as much as him, may God rest her soul. If the holy umbrella was used at her funeral, it can be used at his too. If God is angry at its having been used for her, He will only be a little more angry at its being used for him; and if He was not angry then, He won't be angry now either."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Widow Adamecz, talking such nonsense. Don't bother me any more with your superstitions. The whole thing is simply ridiculous."

St. Peter's Umbrella

But the two women were not to be put off.

"We know what we know," they said, nodding their heads sagely, "your honor can't deceive us."

And they worried him to such an extent that he was obliged at last to give way, and agreed to bring the red umbrella to János Srankó's funeral, but he added as an afterthought, "That is, of course, if the owner does not come for it before then. For it is certain that some one left it here, and if they come for it, I shall be obliged to give it them."

"Well," said Widow Adamecz, "as far as that goes we can sleep in peace, for the one who brought it only walks on our planet once in a thousand years."

Nobody appeared to claim the umbrella, and so the next day, though it was a lovely afternoon, and not a cloud was to be seen on the horizon, the young priest opened his umbrella, and followed the coffin to the grave.

Four strong men carried the bier on which the coffin was placed, and as chance willed it, when they passed the smithy, one of the bearers stumbled and fell, which so startled the one walking behind him, that he lost his presence of mind, the bier lurched to one side, and the coffin fell to the ground.

It cracked, then the fastenings gave way, and it broke to pieces; first the embroidered shirt was

The Umbrella and St. Peter

visible, and then the supposed dead man himself, who awoke from the trance he had been in, moved slightly, and whispered:

“Where am I?”

Of course every one was as surprised as they could be, and there was plenty of running backward and forward to the smithy for blankets, shawls, and pillows, of which they made a bed in a cart that was outside waiting to be repaired. Into this they put the man on whom such a miracle had been worked, and the funeral procession returned as a triumphant one to Srankó's house. He had so far recovered on the way home as to ask for something to eat immediately on his arrival.

They brought him a jug of milk, at which he shook his head. Lajkó offered him a flask of brandy he had taken with him to cheer his drooping spirits. He smiled and accepted it.

This ridiculous incident was the beginning of the umbrella legend, which spread and spread beyond the village, beyond the mountains, increasing in detail as it went. If a mark or impression were found on a rock it was said to be the print of St. Peter's foot. If a flower of particularly lovely color were found growing on the meadow, St. Peter's stick had touched the spot. Everything went to prove that St. Peter had been in Glogova lately. After all it was no common case,

St. Peter's Umbrella

The only real mystery in the whole affair was how the umbrella had come to be spread over little Veronica's basket; but that was enough to make the umbrella noted. And its fame spread far and wide, as far as the Bjela Voda flows; the Slovak peasants told the tale sitting round the fire, with various additions, according to the liveliness of their imagination. They imagined St. Peter opening the gates of Heaven, and coming out with the umbrella in his hand, in order to bring it down to the priest's little sister. The only question they could not settle was how St. Peter had got down to the earth. But they thought he must have stood on a cloud which let him gently down, and set him on the top of one of the neighboring hills.

Then they discussed the power the umbrella possessed of raising the dead to life, and so the legend was spread abroad. And whenever a rich peasant died, even in the villages miles off, Father János was sent for, with the red umbrella, to read the burial services. He was also sent for to sick persons who wished the umbrella spread over them while they confessed their sins. It must have a good effect, and either the sick person would recover, or if he did not do that he was at least sanctified.

If a newly married couple wished to do things very grandly (and they generally do), they were

The Umbrella and St. Peter

not only married at home by their own priest, but they made a pilgrimage to Glogova in order to join hands once more under the sacred umbrella. And that, to them, was the real ceremony. The bell-ringer held it over their heads, and in return many a piece of silver found its way into his pocket. And as for the priest, money and presents simply poured in upon him. At first he fought against all this superstition, but after a while even he began to believe that the red umbrella, which day by day got more faded and shabby, was something out of the common. Had it not appeared on the scene as though in answer to his prayer, and was it not the source of all his good fortune?

“Oh, Lord!” he had prayed, “unless Thou workest a miracle, how am I to bring up the child?”

And lo and behold, the miracle had been worked! Money, food, all the necessities of life flowed from that ragged old umbrella. Its fame spread to higher circles too. The Bishop of Besztercebánya heard of it and sent for Father János and the umbrella; and after having examined it and heard the whole story, he crossed his hands on his breast and exclaimed: “Deus est omnipotens.” Which was equivalent to saying he believed in it.

A few weeks later he went still further, and sent

St. Peter's Umbrella

orders for the umbrella to be kept in the church, instead of in the priest's room. Upon which Father János answered that in reality the umbrella belonged to his little sister, who was still a minor, so that he had no right to it, nor to give it away. But he was sure, as soon as Veronica was of age, she would make a present of it to the church. But the umbrella not only brought good fortune to the priest, who soon started a small farm, and in a few years built himself a new house, and kept a horse and trap, but it made a great difference in Glogova too. Every summer numbers of ladies came from the small watering-places round about, very often countesses too (mostly old countesses), in order to say a prayer under the umbrella, and for these an inn was built opposite the priest's house, called the "Miraculous Umbrella." In fact, Glogova increased in size and importance from day to day.

In time the villagers began to feel ashamed of the simple wooden belfry, and had a tower built to the church, and hung two bells in it from Besztercebánya. János Srankó had a splendid statue of the Holy Family erected in front of the church, to commemorate his resurrection from the dead. The governess (for a time Father János had a governess for little Veronica) filled the priest's garden with dahlias, fuchsias, and

The Umbrella and St. Peter

other flowers which the inhabitants of Glogova had never yet seen.

Everything improved and was beautified (except Widow Adamecz, who got uglier day by day), and the villagers even went so far as to discuss on Sunday afternoons the advisability of building a chapel upon the mountain St. Peter had been seen on, in order to make it a place of pilgrimage and attract even more visitors.

The Gregorics Family

PART II

CHAPTER I.

THE TACTLESS MEMBER OF THE FAMILY.

MANY years before our story begins, there lived in Besztercebánya a man of the name of Pál Gregorics, who was always called a tactless man, whereas all his life was spent in trying to please others. Pál Gregorics was always chasing Popularity, and instead of finding it came face to face with Criticism, a much less pleasing figure. He was born nine months after his father's death, an act of tactlessness which gave rise to plenty of gossip, and much unpleasantness to his mother, who was a thoroughly good, honest woman. If he had only arrived a little earlier . . . but after all *he* could not help it. As far as the other Gregorics were concerned, he had better not have been born at all, for of course the estates were cut up more than they would otherwise have been.

The child was weak and sickly, and his grown-up brothers always hoped for his death; however, he did not die, but grew up, and when of age took possession of his fortune, most of

St. Peter's Umbrella

which he had inherited from his mother, who had died during his minority and left him her whole fortune; whereas the children of the first wife only had their share of the father's fortune, which, however, was not to be sneered at, for old Gregorics had done well in the wine trade. In those days it was easier to get on in that line than it is now, for, in the first place, there was wine in the country, and in the second place there were no Jews. In these days there is plenty of Danube water in the wine-cellars, but not much juice of the grapes.

Nature had blessed Pál Gregorics with a freckly face and red hair, which made people quote the old saying, "Red-haired people are never good."

So Pál Gregorics made up his mind to prove that it was untrue. All these old sayings are like pots in which generations have been cooking for ages, and Pál Gregorics intended to break one of them. He meant to be "as good as a piece of bread, and as soft as butter, which allows itself to be spread equally well on white bread or black." (This is a favorite phrase among the peasants, when describing a very good man.)

And he was as good a man as you could wish to see, but what was the good of it? Some evil spirit always seemed to accompany him and induce people to misunderstand his intentions.

The Tactless Member

The day he came back from Pest, where he had been completing his studies, he went into a tobacconist's shop and bought some fine Havanas, which at once set all the tongues in Bésztercebánya wagging.

"The good-for-nothing fellow smokes seven-penny cigars, does he? That is a nice way to begin. He'll die in the workhouse. Oh, if his poor dead father could rise from his grave and see him! Why, the old man used to mix dry potato leaves with his tobacco to make it seem more, and poured the dregs of the coffee on it to make it burn slower."

Pál Gregorics heard that he had displeased the good townsfolk by smoking such dear cigars, and immediately took to short halfpenny ones. But this did not suit them either, and they remarked:

"Really, Pál Gregorics is about the meanest man going, he'll be worse than his father in time!"

Gregorics felt very vexed at being called mean, and decided to take the very next opportunity to prove the contrary. The opportunity presented itself in the form of a ball, given in aid of a hospital, and of which the Mayoress of the town was patroness. The programme announced that though the tickets were two florins each, any larger sum would be gratefully accepted. So Pál Gregorics gave twenty florins for his two-florin

St. Peter's Umbrella

ticket, thinking to himself "They shan't say I am mean this time."

Upon that the members of the committee put their heads together and decided that Pál Gregorics was a tactless fellow. It was the greatest impertinence on his part to outbid the Mayor, and a baron to boot! Baron Radvánszky had given ten florins for his ticket, and Gregorics throws down twenty. Why, it was an insult! The son of a wine merchant! What things do happen in the nineteenth century, to be sure! Whatever Pál Gregorics did was wrong; if he quarrelled with some one and would not give in, they said he was a brawler; and if he gave in, he was a coward.

Though he had studied law, he did nothing particular at first, only drove to his estate a mile or two out of the town and spent a few hours shooting; or he went for a few days to Vienna, where he had a house inherited from his mother; and the rest of his time he spent in Besztercebánya.

"Pál Gregorics," they said, "is a lazy fellow; he does nothing useful from one year's end to the other. Why are such useless creatures allowed to live?"

Pál heard this too, and quite agreed with them that he ought to get some work to do, and not waste his life as he was doing. Of course, every

The Tactless Member

one should earn the bread they eat. So he looked for some employment in the town. That was enough to set all the tongues wagging again. What? Gregorics wanted work in the town? Was he not ashamed of himself, trying to take the bread out of poor men's mouths, when he had plenty of cake for himself? Let him leave the small amount of employment there was in the town to those who really needed it. Gregorics quite understood the force of this argument, and gave up his idea. He now turned his thoughts toward marriage, and determined to start a family; after all that was as good an occupation as any other.

So he began to frequent various houses where there were pretty girls to be met, and where he, being a good match, was well received; but his step-brothers, who were always in hopes that the delicate little man would not live long, did their best to upset his plans in this case too. So Pál Gregorics got so many refusals one after the other, that he was soon renowned in the whole neighborhood. Later on he could have found many who would have been glad of an offer from him, but they were ashamed to let him see it. After all, how could they marry a man whom so many girls had refused?

On the eve of St. Andrew's any amount of lead was melted by the young girls of the town,

St. Peter's Umbrella

but not one of them saw in the hardened mass the form of Gregorics. In fact, none of the young girls wanted to marry him. What they looked for was romance, not money. Perhaps some old maid would have jumped at his offer, but between the young maids and the old maids there is a great difference—they belong to two different worlds. The young girls were told that Pál Gregorics spat blood, and of course, the moment they heard that, they would have nothing more to do with him, so that at his next visit their hearts would beat loudly, but not in the same way they had done last time he drove up in his coach and four. Poor Gregorics! What a pity! The horses outside may paw the ground, and toss their manes as much as they like, what difference does it make? Pál Gregorics spits blood! Oh, you silly little Marys and Carolines. Of course Pál Gregorics is an ugly, sickly man, but think how rich he is; and after all, he only spits his own blood. So what can it matter to you?

Believe me, Rosalia, who is ten years older than you, would not be such a silly little goose, if she had your chances, for she is a philosopher, and if she were to be told that Pál Gregorics spits blood she would only think to herself, "What an interesting man!" And aloud she would say, "I will nurse him." And deep down in her mind

The Tactless Member

where she keeps the ideas that cannot be put into words, which, in fact, are hardly even thoughts as yet, she would find these words, "If Gregorics spits blood already, he won't last so very long."

You silly little girls, you know nothing of life as yet; your mothers have put you into long dresses, but your minds have not grown in proportion. Don't be angry with me for speaking so plainly, but it is my duty to show my readers why Pál Gregorics did not find a wife among you. The reason is a simple one. The open rose is not perfectly pure; bees have bathed in its chalice, insects have slept in it. But in the heart of an opening bud, not a speck of dust is to be found.

That is why Pál Gregorics was refused by so many young girls, and by degrees he began to see that they were right (for, as I said before, he was a good, simple man), marriage was not for him, as he spat blood; for after all, blood is one of the necessities of life. When he had once made up his mind not to marry, he troubled his head no more about the girls, but turned his attention to the young married women. He had beautiful bouquets sent from Vienna for Mrs. Vozáry, and one fine evening he let five hundred nightingales loose in Mrs. Muskulyi's garden. He had the greatest difficulty in getting so many together, but a bird-fancier in Transylvania had undertaken to send them to him. The beautiful young woman,

St. Peter's Umbrella

as she turned on her pillows, was surprised to hear how delightfully the birds were singing in her garden that night.

He had no success with the young married women either, and was beginning to get thoroughly sick of life, when the war broke out. They would not take him for a soldier either, they said he was too small and thin, he would not be able to stand the fatigues of war. But he wanted to do something at any cost.

The recruiting sergeant, who was an old friend of his, gave him the following advice:

"I don't mind taking you if you particularly wish to work with us, but you must look out for some occupation with no danger attached to it. The campaign is fatiguing; we'll give you something in the writing business."

Gregorics was wounded in his pride.

"I intend accepting only the most dangerous employment," he said; "now which do you consider the most dangerous?"

"Why, that of a spy," was the answer.

"Then I will be a spy."

And he kept his word. He dressed himself as one of those vagrants of whom so many were seen at that time, and went from one camp to the other, carrying information and letters. Old soldiers remember and still talk of the little old man with the red umbrella, who always managed

The Tactless Member

to pass through the enemy's camp, his gaze as vacant as though he were unable to count up to ten. With his thin, bird-like face, his ragged trousers, his battered top-hat, and his red umbrella, he was seen everywhere. If you once saw him it was not easy to forget him, and there was no one who did not see him, though few guessed at his business. Some one once wrote about him: "The little man with the red umbrella is the devil himself, but he belongs to the better side of the family."

In the peaceful time that succeeded the war, he returned to Besztercebánya, and became a misanthrope. He never moved out of his ugly, old stone house, and thought no more of making a position for himself, nor of marrying. And like most old bachelors he fell in love with his cook. His theory now was to simplify matters. He needed a woman to cook for him and to wait on him, and he needed a woman to love; that means two women in the house. Why should he not simplify matters and make those two women one? Anna Wibra was a big stout woman, somewhere from the neighborhood of Detvár. She was a rather good-looking woman, and used to sing very prettily when washing up the plates and dishes in the evening. She had such a nice soft voice that her master once called her into his sitting-room, and made her sit down on one of

St. Peter's Umbrella

the leather-covered chairs. She had never sat so comfortably in her life before.

"I like your voice, Anna; sing me something here, so that I can hear you better."

So Anna started a very melancholy sort of song, "The Recruit's Letter," in which he complains to the girl he loves of all the hardships of war.

Gregorics was quite softened by the music, and three times he exclaimed: "What a wonderful voice!" And he kept moving nearer and nearer to Anna, till all at once he began to stroke her cheek. At this she turned scarlet, and jumped up from her chair, pushing him away from her.

"That's not in my contract, sir!" she exclaimed.

Gregorics blushed too.

"Don't be silly, Anna," he said.

But Anna tossed her head and walked to the door.

"Don't run away, you stupid, I shan't eat you."

But Anna would not listen, and took refuge in her kitchen, from which she was not to be coaxed again that evening.

The next day she gave notice to leave, but her master pacified her by the gift of a golden ring, and a promise never to lay a finger on her again. He told her he could not let her go, for he would never get any one to cook as well as she did.

The Tactless Member

Anna was pleased with the praise and with the ring, and stayed, on condition that he kept his promise. He did keep it for a time, and then forgot it, and Anna was again on the point of leaving. But Gregorics pacified her this time with a necklace of corals with a golden clasp, like the Baronesses Radvánszky wore at church. The necklace suited her so well, that she no longer thought of forbidding her master to touch her. He was rich enough, let him buy her a few pretty things.

In fact, the same afternoon she paid a visit to the old woman who kept a grocer's shop next door, and asked whether it would hurt very much to have her ears pierced. The old woman laughed.

"Oh, you silly creature," she said, "you surely don't want to wear earrings? Anna, Anna, you have bad thoughts in your head."

Anna protested and then banged the door behind her, so that the bell fastened to it went on ringing for some moments.

Of course she wanted some earrings, why should she not have some? God had given her ears the same as to all those grand ladies she saw at church. And before the day was over she had found out that it would hardly hurt her at all to have her ears pierced.

Yes, she wanted to have some earrings, and now she did all she could to bring Gregorics into

St. Peter's Umbrella

temptation. She dressed herself neatly, wore a red ribbon in her hair, in fact, made herself thoroughly irresistible. Gregorics may have been wily enough to be a spy for a whole Russian and Austrian army, but a woman, however simple, was far deeper than he.

Next Sunday she went to church with earrings in her ears, much to the amusement of the lads and lasses of the town, who had long ago dubbed her "the Grenadier." And in a few weeks' time the whole town was full of gossip about Gregorics and his cook, and all sorts of tales were told, some of them supremely ridiculous. His step-brothers would not believe it.

"A Gregorics and a servant! Such a thing was never heard of before!"

The neighbors tried to pacify them by saying there was nothing strange in the fact, on the contrary it was quite natural. Pál Gregorics had never done things correctly all his life. How much was true and how much false is not known, but the gossip died away by degrees, only to awaken again some years later, when a small boy was seen playing about with a pet lamb in Pál Gregorics's courtyard. Who was the child? Where did he come from? Gregorics himself was often seen playing with him. And people, who sometimes out of curiosity looked through the keyhole of the great wooden gates, saw

The Tactless Member

Gregorics, with red ribbons tied round his waist for reins, playing at horses with the child, who with a whip in his hand kept shouting, "Gee-up, Ráró." And the silly old fellow would kick and stamp and plunge, and even race round the courtyard. And now he was rarely seen limping through the town in his shabby clothes, to which he had become accustomed when he was a spy, and under his arm his red umbrella; he always had it with him, in fine or wet weather, and never left it in the hall when he paid a visit, but took it into the room with him, and kept it constantly in his hand. Sometimes the lady of the house asked if he would not put it down.

"No, no," he would answer, "I am so used to having it in my hand that I feel quite lost without it. It is as though one of my ribs were missing, upon my word it is!"

There was a good deal of talk about this umbrella. Why was he so attached to it? It was incomprehensible. Supposing it contained something important? Somebody once said (I think it was István Pazár who had served in the war), that the umbrella contained all sorts of notes, telegrams, and papers written in his spying days, and that they were in the handle of the umbrella, which was hollow. Well, perhaps it was true.

The other members of the Gregorics family looked with little favor on the small boy in the

St. Peter's Umbrella

Gregorics's household, and never rested till they had looked through all the baptismal registers they could lay hands on. At last they came upon the entry they wanted, "György Wibra, illegitimate; mother, Anna Wibra."

He was a pretty little fellow, so full of life and spirits that every one took a fancy to him.

CHAPTER II.

DUBIOUS SIGNS.

LITTLE Gyuri Wibra grew to be a fine lad, strong and broad chested. Pál Gregorics was always saying, "Where on earth does he take that chest from?"

He was so narrow-chested himself that he always gazed with admiration at the boy's sturdy frame, and was so taken up in the contemplation of it, that he hardly interested himself in the child's studies. And he was a clever boy too. An old pensioned professor, Márton Kupeczky, gave him lessons every day, and was full of his praises.

"There's plenty in him, sir," he used to say. "He'll be a great man, sir. What will you bet, sir?"

Gregorics was always delighted, for he loved the boy, though he never showed it. On these occasions he would smile and answer:

"I'll bet you a cigar, and we'll consider I've lost it."

And then he would offer the old professor, who

St. Peter's Umbrella

was very fond of betting, one of his choicest cigars.

"I never had such a clever pupil before," the old professor used to say. "I have had to teach very ordinary minds all my life, and have wasted my talents on them. A sad thing to say, sir. I feel like that nugget of gold which was lost at the Mint. You know the tale, sir? What, you have never heard it? Why, a large nugget of gold was once lost at the Mint. It was searched for everywhere, but could not be found. Well, after a long examination of all the clerks, it turned out that the gold had been melted by accident with the copper for the kreutzers. You understand me, sir? I have been pouring my soul into two or three generations of fools, but, thank goodness, I have at last found a worthy recipient for my knowledge. Of course, you understand me, sir?"

But Pál Gregorics needed no spurring on in this case; he had fixed intentions as far as the boy was concerned, and folks were not far wrong when they (mostly in order to vex the other Gregorics) prophesied the end would be that Gregorics would marry Anna Wibra, and adopt her boy. Kupeczky himself often said:

"Yes, that will be the end of it. Who will bet with me?"

It would have been the end, and the correct way too, for Gregorics was fond enough of the

Dubious Signs

boy to do a correct thing for once in a way. But two things happened to prevent the carrying out of this plan. First of all Anna fell from a ladder and broke her leg, so that she limped all her life after, and who wants a lame wife?

The second thing was, that little Gyuri was taken ill very suddenly. He turned blue in the face and was in convulsions; they thought he would die. Gregorics fell on his knees by the side of the bed of the sick child, kissed his face and cold little hands, and asked despairingly:

“What is the matter, my boy? Tell me what hurts you.”

“I don’t know, uncle,” moaned the child.

At that moment Gregorics suffered every pain the child felt, and his heart seemed breaking. He seized hold of the doctor’s hand, and his agony pressed these words from him:

“Doctor, save the child, and I’ll give you a bag full of gold.”

The doctor saved him, and got the bag of money too, as Gregorics had promised in that hour of danger. (Of course the doctor did not choose the bag, Gregorics had one made on purpose.)

The doctor cured the boy, but made Gregorics ill, for he instilled suspicion into his mind by swearing that the boy’s illness was the result of poison. Nothing could have upset Gregorics

St. Peter's Umbrella

as much as this declaration. How could it have happened? Had he eaten any poisonous mushrooms? Gyuri shook his head. Well, what could he have eaten?

The mother racked her brains to find out what could have been the cause. Perhaps this, perhaps that, perhaps the vinegar was bad, or the copper saucepans had not been quite clean? Gregorics shook his head sorrowfully.

“Don't talk nonsense, Anna,” he said.

Deep down in his heart was a thought which he was afraid to put into words, but which entirely spoiled his life for him, and robbed him of sleep and appetite. He had thought of his step-brothers; they had something to do with it, he was sure. There was an end to all his plans for adopting the boy, giving him his own name, and leaving him his fortune. No, no, it would cost Gyuri his life; they would kill him if he gave them the chance. But he did not intend to give them the chance. He trembled for the child, and hardly dared to love him. He started a new line of conduct, a very mad one too. He ordered the boy to address him as “sir” for the future, and forbade him to love him.

“It was only a bit of fun, you know, my allowing you to call me ‘uncle.’ Do you understand?”

Tears stood in the boy's eyes, and seeing them

Dubious Signs

old Gregorics bent down and kissed them away; and his voice was very sad as he said:

“Don’t tell any one I kissed you, or you will be in great danger.”

Precaution now became his mania. He took Kupeczky into his house, and the old professor had to be with the boy day and night, and taste every bit of food he was to eat. If Gyuri went outside the gates, he was first stripped of his velvet suit and patent leather shoes, and dressed in a ragged old suit kept on purpose, and allowed to run barefoot. Let people ask in the streets, “Who is that little scarecrow?” And let those who knew answer, “Oh, that is Gregorics’s cook’s child.”

And, in order thoroughly to deceive his relations, he undertook to educate one of his step-sister’s boys; took him up to Vienna and put him in the Terezianum, and kept him there in grand style with the sons of counts and barons. To his other nephews and nieces he sent lots of presents, so that the Gregorics family, who had never liked the younger brother, came at last to the conclusion that he was not such a bad fellow after all, only something of a fool.

Little Gyuri himself was sent away to school after a time; to Kolozsvár and then to Szeged, as far away as possible, so as to be out of reach of the family. At these times Kupeczky secretly

St. Peter's Umbrella

disappeared from the town too, though he might as well have been accompanied by a drum and fife band, for not a soul would have asked where he was going.

Doubtless there was a lot of exaggeration in all this secrecy and precaution, but exaggeration had a large share in Gregorics's character. If he undertook something very difficult he was more adventurous than the devil himself, and once his fear was overcome, he saw hope in every corner. His love for the child and his fear were both exaggerated, but he could not help it.

While the boy was pursuing his studies with success, the little man with the red umbrella was placing his money in landed estate. He said he had bought a large estate in Bohemia, and in order to pay for it had been obliged to sell his house in Vienna. Not long after he had built a sugar factory on the estate, upon which he began to look out for a purchaser for his Privorec estates. He soon found one in the person of a rich merchant from Kassa. There was something strange and mysterious in the fact of the little man making so many changes in his old age. One day he had his house in Besztercebánya transferred to Anna Wibra's name. And the little man was livelier and more contented than he had ever been in his life before. He began to pay visits again, interested himself in things and

Dubious Signs

events, chattered and made himself agreeable to every one, dined with all his relations in turn, throwing out allusions and hints, such as, "After all, I can't take my money with me into the next world," and so on. He visited all the ladies who had refused him years ago, and very often went off by train, with his red umbrella under his arm, and stayed away for months and weeks at a time. No one troubled about him, every one said:

"I suppose the old fellow has gone to look after his property."

He never spoke much about his Bohemian estates, though his step-brothers were much interested in them. They both offered in turns to go there with him, for they had never been in Bohemia; but Gregorics always had an answer ready, and to tell the truth he did not seem to trouble himself much about the whole affair. Which was not to be wondered at, for he had no more possessions in Bohemia than the dirt and dust he brought home in his clothes from Carlsbad, where he spent a summer doing the cure.

The whole story was only trumped up to put his relations off the scent, whereas the truth was that he had turned all he had into money, and deposited it in a bank in order to be able to give it to the boy. Gyuri's inheritance would be a draft on a bank, a bit of paper which no one would see, which he could keep in his waistcoat pocket, and

St. Peter's Umbrella

yet be a very rich man. It was well and carefully thought out. So he did not really go to his estates, but simply to the town where Gyuri was studying with his old professor.

Those were his happiest times, the only rays of light in his lonely life; weeks in which he could pet the boy to his heart's content. Gyuri was a favorite at school, always the first in his class, and a model of good behavior.

The old man used to stay for weeks in Szeged and enjoy the boy's society. They were often seen walking arm in arm on the banks of the Tisza, and when they and Kupeczky talked Slovak together, every one turned at the sound of the strange language, wondering which of the many it was that had been invented at the Tower of Babel.

When the last lesson was over, Gregorics was waiting at the gate, and the delighted boy would run and join him—though his comrades, who, one would have thought, would have had enough to occupy their thoughts elsewhere, teased him about the old man. They swore he was the devil in *propria persona*, that he did Gyuri Wibra's exercises for him, and that he had a talisman which caused him to know his lessons well. It was easy to be the first in his class at that rate. There were even some silly enough to declare the old gentleman had a cloven foot, if you could

Dubious Signs

only manage to see him with his boots off. The old red umbrella, too, which he always had with him, they thought must be a talisman, something after the style of Aladdin's lamp. Pista Paracsányi, the best classical verse writer, made up some lines on the red umbrella; which were soon learnt by most of the boys, and spouted on every possible occasion, in order to annoy the "head boy." But the poet had his reward in the form of a black eye and a bleeding nose, bestowed upon him by Gyuri Wibra, who, however, began to be vexed himself at the sight of the red umbrella, which made his old friend seem ridiculous in the eyes of his schoolfellows, and one day he broached the subject to the old gentleman.

"You might really buy a new umbrella, uncle."

The old gentleman smiled.

"What, you don't like my umbrella?"

"You only get laughed at, and the boys have even made verses about it."

"Well, my boy, tell your schoolfellows that 'all that glitters is not gold,' as they may have heard; but tell them, too, that very often things that do not glitter may be gold. You will understand that later on when you are grown up."

He thought for a bit, idly making holes in the sand with the umbrella, and then added:

"When the umbrella is yours."

Gyuri made a wry face.

St. Peter's Umbrella

"Thank you, uncle, but I hope you don't mean to give it me on my birthday instead of the pony you promised me?"

And he laughed heartily, upon which the old gentleman began to laugh too, contentedly stroking his mustache, consisting of half a dozen hairs. There was something strange in his laugh, as though he had laughed *inward* to his own soul.

"No, no, you shall have your pony. But I assure you that the umbrella will once belong to you, and you will find it very useful to protect you from the wind and clouds."

Gyuri thought this great nonsense. Such old gentlemen always attached themselves so to their belongings, and thought such a lot of them. Why, one of his professors had a penholder he had used for forty years!

One episode in connection with the umbrella remained fixed in Gyuri's memory ever after. One day they rowed out to the "Yellow," as they call a small island situated just where the Maros and the Tisza met, and where the fishermen of Szeged cook their far-famed "fish with paprika" (a kind of cayenne grown in Hungary, and much used in the national dishes). We read in Márton's famous cookery book that "fish with paprika" must only be boiled in Tisza water, and the same book says that a woman cannot prepare the dish properly.

Dubious Signs

Well, as I said before, the three of them rowed out to the "Yellow." As they were landing they struck against a sand heap, and Gregorics, who was in the act of rising from his seat, stumbled and lost his balance, and in trying to save himself from falling dropped his umbrella into the water, and the current carried it away with it.

"My umbrella, save it!" shouted Gregorics, who had turned as white as a sheet, and in whose eyes they read despair. The two boatmen smiled, and the elder one, slowly removing his pipe from his mouth, remarked laconically:

"No great loss that, sir; it was only fit to put in the hands of a scarecrow."

"One hundred florins to the one who brings it me back," groaned the old gentleman.

The boatmen, astonished, gazed at one another, then the younger man began to pull off his boots.

"Are you joking, sir, or do you mean it?"

"Here are the hundred florins," said Gregorics, taking a bank-note from his pocket-book.

The young man, a fine specimen of a Szeged fisherman, turned to Kupeczky.

"Is the old chap mad?" he asked in his lackadaisical way, while the umbrella quietly floated down the stream.

"Oh dear no," answered Kupeczky, who, however, was himself surprised at Gregorics's strange behavior.

St. Peter's Umbrella

"It's not worth it, domine spectabilis," he added, turning to the old gentleman.

"Quick, quick!" gasped Gregorics.

Another doubt had arisen in the boatman's mind.

"Is the bank-note a real one, sir?" he asked.

"Of course it is. Make haste!"

The man, who had by this time taken off both his boots and his jacket, now sprang into the water like a frog, and began to swim after the umbrella, the old boatman shouting after him:

"You're a fool, Jankó; come back, don't exert yourself for nothing."

Gregorics, afraid the warning would take effect, flew at the old man and seized hold of his tie.

"Hold your tongue or I'll murder you. Do you want to ruin me?"

"Well, what would that matter? Do you want to throttle me? Leave go of my neck-tie."

"Well, let the boy go after my umbrella."

"After all, what is the hen good for if not to look after the chickens?" muttered the old boatman. "The current just here is very strong, and he won't be able to reach the umbrella. And what's the good of it, when it will come back of itself when the tide turns in half an hour's time,

Dubious Signs

to the other side of the 'Yellow.' In half an hour the fishermen will spread their nets, and the gentleman's umbrella will be sure to be caught in them; even if a big fish swallows it we can cut it open."

And as the old fisherman had said, so it came to pass; the umbrella was caught in one of the fishing nets, and great was the joy of old Gregorics when he once more held his treasure in his hand. He willingly paid the young fisherman the promised one hundred florins, though it was not really he who had brought the umbrella back; and in addition he rewarded the fishermen handsomely, who, the next day, spread the tale through the whole town of the old madman, who had given one hundred florins for the recovery of an old torn red umbrella. They had never before caught such a big fish in the Tisza.

"Perhaps the handle of the umbrella was of gold?"

"Not a bit of it; it was only of wood."

"Perhaps the linen was particularly fine?"

"Rubbish! Is there any linen in the world worth one hundred florins? It was plain red linen, and even that was torn and ragged."

"Then you have not told us the tale properly."

"I've told you the whole truth."

Kupeczky remarked to Gyuri:

St. Peter's Umbrella

“I would not mind betting the old gentleman has a tile loose.”

“A strange man, but a good one,” answered Gyuri. “Who knows what memories are attached to that umbrella!”

CHAPTER III.

PAL GREGORICS'S DEATH AND WILL.

No signification was attached to the above-mentioned incident till years after, when every one had forgotten all about it, Gyuri included. As for Kupeczky, he could not remember it, for as soon as the news came from Besztercebánya that old Gregorics was dead, he took to his bed and never rose from it again.

"I am dying, Gyuri," he said to his sobbing pupil, "I feel it. It was only Gregorics kept me alive, or rather I kept myself alive for his sake. But now I'm done for. I don't know if he has provided for your future, my poor boy, but it's all over with me, I'm dying, I wouldn't mind betting it."

And he would have won his bet too. Gyuri went home for Gregorics's funeral, and a week later the landlady sent word that the old professor was dead, and he was to send money for the funeral.

But what was Kupeczky's death to that of

St. Peter's Umbrella

Gregorics? The poor old fellow was quite right to take his departure, for no one wanted him, no one took any notice of him. He slipped quietly into the next world, just as one ought to do; even during his life he caused no disturbance; he was here, he went, and there was an end of it. But Pál Gregorics went to work in quite a different style. He was taken ill with cramp on the Thursday in Holy Week, and went to bed in great pain. After a time the cramp ceased, but left him very weak, and he fell asleep toward evening. Some hours after he opened his eyes and said:

“Anna, bring me my umbrella, and put it here, near my bed. That’s it! Now I feel better!”

He turned over and went to sleep again, but soon woke up with a start.

“Anna,” he said, “I have had a fearful dream. I thought I was a horse, and was being taken to a fair to be sold. My step-brothers and nephews appeared on the scene, and began to bid for me, and I stood trembling there, wondering which of them I was to belong to. My brother Boldizsár pulled open my mouth, examined my teeth, and then said, ‘He is not worth anything, we could only get five florins for his skin.’ As he was speaking, up came a man with a scythe. He poked me in the ribs (it hurts me still), and exclaimed, ‘The horse is mine, I’ll buy it.’ I turned and looked at him, and was horrified to see it was

Pal Gregorics's Death and Will

Death himself. 'But I will not give the halter with the horse,' said my owner. 'It does not matter,' answered the man with the scythe, 'I can get one from the shop round the corner; wait a minute, I'll be back directly.' And then I awoke. Oh, it was dreadful!"

His red hair stood on end, and beads of perspiration rolled down his face, which Anna wiped with a handkerchief.

"Nonsense," she said, "you must not believe in dreams; they do not come from Heaven, but from indigestion."

"No, no," said the sick man, "I'm going, I feel it. My time will be up when they bring the halter. Don't waste words trying to console me, but bring me pen and paper, I want to send a telegram to the boy; he must come home at once. I'll wait for his arrival, yes, I'll wait till then."

They brought a table to his bed, and he wrote the following words:

"Come at once, uncle is dying and wants to give you something.—Mother."

"Send the servant with this at once."

He was very restless while the man was away, and asked three times if he had returned. At length he came back, but with bad news; the telegraph office was closed for the night.

"Well, it does not matter," said Anna, "we

St. Peter's Umbrella

will send it in the morning. The master is not really so bad, it is half imagination; but he is so nervous we must not excite him, so go in and tell him the telegram is sent."

He was quieter after that, and began to reckon at what time the boy would arrive, and decided he might be there by the afternoon of the second day.

He slept quietly all night, and got up the next morning very pale and weak, but went about putting things straight and turning out drawers.

"It is unnecessary to send the telegram," thought Anna to herself. "He seems nearly himself again, and will be all right in a day or two."

The whole day he pottered about, and in the afternoon shut himself up in his study and drank a small bottle of Tokay wine, and wrote a great deal. Anna only went in once to see if he wanted anything. No, he wanted nothing.

"Have you any pain?"

"My side hurts me, just where the man with the scythe touched me. There is something wrong inside."

"Does it hurt very much?"

"Yes, very much!"

"Shall I send for a doctor?"

"No."

In the evening he sent for his lawyer, János

Pal Gregorics's Death and Will

Sztolarik. He was quite lively when he came, made him sit down, and sent for another bottle of Tokay.

"The February vintage, Anna," he called after her.

The wine had been left him by his father, and dated from the year when there had been two vintages in Tokay in twelve months, one in February, and one in October. Only kings can drink the like of it. On account of the mildness of the winter the vines had been left uncovered, had flowered and borne fruit, so that in February they were able to have a vintage, and you can imagine what a flavor those grapes had. There was never anything like it before nor after. Old Gregorics's father used to call it the "Life-giver," and often said:

"If a man intending to commit suicide were to drink a thimbleful of it beforehand, he would, if unmarried, go and look up a 'best man,' or, if married, would go and sue for a divorce; but kill himself he would not."

The two friends drank to each other's health, and Gregorics smacked his lips.

"It's devilish good," he said.

Then he gave the lawyer a sealed packet.

"In that you will find my will," he said. "I sent for you in order to give it you."

He rubbed his hands and smiled.

St. Peter's Umbrella

"There will be some surprises in that."

"Why are you in such a hurry with it? There is plenty of time," said Sztolarik, taking the packet.

Gregorics smiled.

"I know more about that than you, Sztolarik. But take a drop more, and don't let us talk of death. And now I'll tell you how my father got this wine. Well, he was a very sly customer, and if he couldn't get a thing by fair means, he got it by foul, and I have inherited some of his slyness from him. But mine is not the genuine article; however, that does not matter. In Zemplin there lived a very, very rich man, a count, and an ass into the bargain; at least he was a good-hearted man, and liked to give pleasure to others, thus proving that he was an ass. My father used to buy his wine of him, and if they had struck a good bargain the count used to give him a glass of this nectar. Being an assiduous wine merchant, of course my father was always worrying him to sell him some of the wine, but the count would not hear of it, and said, 'The Emperor Ferdinand has not enough money to buy it!' Well, once when they were drinking a small glass of the 'Life-giver,' my father began sighing deeply: 'If my poor wife could only drink a thimbleful of this every day for two months, I am sure she would get quite well again.' Upon which the count's

Pal Gregorics's Death and Will

heart softened, and he called up his major-domo and said: 'Fill Mr. Gregorics's cask with the "Life-giver."' A few days later several visitors arrived at the castle, and the count ordered some of the wine to be brought. 'There is none left, sir,' said the butler. 'Why, what has become of it?' asked the count. 'Mr. Gregorics took it with him, there was not even enough to fill his cask!' It was true, for my father had ordered an enormous cask of Mr. Pivák (old Pivák is still alive and remembers the whole story), took the cask in a cart to Zemplin, and, after filling it with the wine, brought it home. Not bad, was it? Drink another glass before you go, Sztolarik."

When the lawyer had gone, Gregorics called his man-servant in.

"Go at once to the ironmonger's and buy a large caldron; then find me two masons and bring them here; but don't speak to a soul about it."

Now that was Matykó's weak point, but if he had not been told to hold his tongue he might have managed to do so later on, when the opportunity for speaking came.

"Off you go, and mind you are back in double quick time!"

Before dark the masons had arrived, and the caldron too. Gregorics took the two men into his room, and carefully shut the door.

"Can you keep silence?" he asked.

St. Peter's Umbrella

The masons looked at each other surprised, and the elder one answered.

“Why, of course we can keep silence, that is the first thing a man does on his arrival in this world.”

“Yes, until he has learnt to talk,” answered Gregorics.

“And even afterward you can make the trial if it is worth your while,” said the younger man slyly.

“It will be worth your while, for you shall have fifty florins each if you will make a hole in a wall large enough to put this caldron in, and then close it again so that no one can see where it was put.”

“Is that all?”

“That is all. But besides that you will receive fifty florins each from the owner of this house every year, as long as you keep silence.”

The masons again exchanged glances, and the elder said:

“We will do it. Where is it to be done?”

“I will show you.”

Gregorics took down a rusty key from a nail, and went out with the men into the courtyard.

“Now follow me,” he said, and led them through the garden to an orchard, in which was a small house built of stone. The most delicious apples grew here, and that had induced old

Pal Gregorics's Death and Will

Gregorics to buy the orchard and house from the widow of the clergyman; he had made a present of both to little Gyuri, and it was entered in his name. When the boy was at home he used to study there with Kupeczky, but since he left it had been quite deserted.

Gregorics led the masons to this little house, and showed them the wall in which he wished an opening made large enough to receive the caldron, and told them when they were ready to come and tell him, as he wished to be present when they walled it in. By midnight the hole was ready, and the masons came and tapped at the window. Gregorics let them in, and they saw the caldron in the middle of the room. The top was covered with sawdust, so that they could not see what was in it, but it was so heavy the two masons could hardly carry it. Gregorics followed them step for step, and did not move until they had built up the wall again.

"If you have it whitewashed to-morrow, sir, no one will find the place."

"I am quite satisfied with the work," said Gregorics. "Here is the promised reward, and now you may go."

The elder of the two masons was surprised at being let off so easily.

"I've heard and read of this sort of thing," he said, "but they did things differently then. They

St. Peter's Umbrella

used to put the masons' eyes out, so that even they could not find the place again, but of course they got a hundred times as much as we do."

"Ah, that was in the good old times," sighed the other.

Gregorics troubled his head no more about them, but closed the heavy oaken door of the house, and went home to bed.

The next morning the cramp returned, and was only partially relieved by the medicine Anna gave him. He was frightfully weak, and only now and then showed interest in what was going on around him.

"Give us a good dinner, Anna," he said once, "and make dumplings, the boy likes them."

And half an hour afterward:

"Make the dumplings with jam, Anna, the boy likes them best so."

The only thing he would take himself was mineral water. Toward afternoon the cramp was much worse, and he began to spit blood. Anna was frightened, and began to cry, and ask if he would not have a doctor or a priest. Gregorics shook his head.

"No, no, I am quite ready to die, everything is in order. I am only waiting for Gyuri. What time is it?"

The church clock just then struck twelve.

"It is time the coach arrived. Go and tell

Pal Gregorics's Death and Will

Matykó to wait outside by the gate, and carry Gyuri's bag in when he comes."

Anna wrung her hands in despair. Should she own she had not sent off the telegram? No, she dare not tell him; she would carry on the deception, and send Matykó out to the gate. But the sick man got more and more restless.

"Anna," he said, "take the horn out, and tell Matykó to blow it when the boy arrives, so that I may know at once."

So Anna took down the horn, and had less courage than ever to own the truth.

The sick man was quieter after that, and listened attentively, raising his head at every sound, and feeling for his umbrella every now and then.

"Open the window, Anna, or I shan't hear Matykó blow the horn."

The sunlight streamed in through the open window, and the perfume of acacia blossoms was borne in on the breeze.

"Put your hand on my forehead, Anna."

She did as she was told, and found his skin cold and dry. The sick man sighed.

"Your hand is too rough, Anna. The boy's is so soft and warm."

He smiled faintly, then opened his eyes.

"Did you not hear anything? Listen! Was that the horn?"

"I don't think so. I heard nothing."

St. Peter's Umbrella

Gregorics pointed to a clock in the next room.

"Stop it," he said. "I can't hear anything. Quick, quick!"

Anna got on a chair, and stopped the clock. In that moment she heard a sound in the next room, something like a groan, then the muttered words: "I hear the horn!" then another groan.

Anna jumped off the chair, and ran into the next room. There all was still; on the bed were large spots of blood, and Gregorics lay there dead, his face white, his eyes wide open and staring at the ceiling. One hand hung down by his side, the other firmly held the umbrella.

Thus died poor Pál Gregorics, and the news of his death soon spread among his relations and his neighbors. The doctor said he had died of some illness with a long Latin name, which no one had ever heard, and said that if he had been called sooner he might have saved him.

Boldizsár was soon on the spot, also his brother Gáspár with all his family. Mrs. Panyóki, the eldest sister, was in the country at the time, and on receipt of the news late the same evening, exclaimed despairingly:

"What a deception! Here have I been praying all my life for him to die in the winter, and he must needs go and die in the summer. Is there any use in praying nowadays? What a decep-

Pal Gregorics's Death and Will

tion! Those two thieves will take everything they can lay their hands on."

She ordered the horses to be harnessed, and drove off as fast as she could, arriving about midnight, by which time the two brothers were in possession of everything, had even taken up their abode in the house, and driven Anna out in spite of her protests that the house was hers, and she was mistress there.

"Only the four walls are yours, and those you shall have. The rest is ours, and a good-for-nothing creature like you has no right here. So off you go!"

Gáspár was a lawyer, and understood things; how was poor Anna to take her stand against him. She could only cry, put on her hat, pack up her box, and limp over the road to Matykó's mother. But before she went the two brothers turned her box out, to see she took nothing with her to which she had no right.

The funeral took place on the third day. It was not a grand one by any means; no one shed a tear except poor Anna, who did not dare go near the coffin for fear of being sent off by the relations. The boy had not yet arrived from Szeged, and it was better so, for he would probably have been turned out of the courtyard by the two brothers of the dead man. But even though Anna did not walk with the mourners, she was

St. Peter's Umbrella

the centre of all eyes, for did not that big house outside the town belong to her now? And when she dropped her handkerchief wet with her tears, did not all the unmarried men, one of them even a lawyer, rush to pick it up for her?

This incident went to prove how much she had risen in people's estimation. After the funeral, there was a general gathering of all the family at Sztolarik's in order to hear the will read. Well, it was a rather strange one on the whole.

The old gentleman had left 2000 florins to the Academy of Arts and Sciences, and 2000 florins to each of the ladies at whose houses he had visited years before, and to those who had refused to marry him. Nine ladies were mentioned by name, and the legacy had been placed in the hands of Sztolarik to be paid at once to the legatees.

The relations listened with bated breath, every now and then throwing in a remark, such as, "Very good. Quite right of him," etc. Only Mrs. Panyóki muttered, when the nine ladies' names were read out: "Dear me, how very strange!"

Boldizsár, who was of opinion it was not worth while worrying over such trifles (after all, Pál had been slightly mad all his life), said grandly:

"Please continue, Mr. Sztolarik."

The lawyer answered shortly: "There is no more!"

Pal Gregorics's Death and Will

Their surprise was great, and there was a general rush to look at the will.

"Impossible!" they all exclaimed at once.

The lawyer turned his back on them repeating:

"I tell you there is not another word!"

"And the rest of his fortune, his estates in Bohemia?"

"There is no mention of them. I can only read what I see written here; you must at least understand that, gentlemen."

"It is incomprehensible," groaned Gáspár.

"The curious part of it is," remarked Boldizsár, "that there is no mention of that woman and her son."

"Yes, of course," answered Gáspár, "it does seem strange."

The lawyer hastened to reassure them.

"It can make no difference to you," he said.

"Whatever fortune there may be that is not mentioned in the will falls to you in any case."

"Yes, of course," said Gáspár, "and that is only right. But the money? Where is it? There must be any amount of it. I'm afraid some wrong has been done."

Mrs. Panyóki said nothing, only looked suspiciously at her two brothers.

CHAPTER IV.

THE AVARICIOUS GREGORICS.

THE contents of the will soon became known in the town, and caused quite a little storm in the various patriarchal drawing-rooms, with their old-fashioned cherry-wood pianos, over which hung the well-known picture, the "March of Miklós Zrinyi," and their white embroidered table-cloths on small tables, in the centre of which stands a silver candlestick, or a glass brought from some watering-place with the name engraved on it, and a bunch of lilac in it. Yes, in those dear little drawing-rooms, there was any amount of gossip going on. It was really disgraceful of Gregorics, but he was always tactless. The idea of compromising honest old ladies, mothers and grandmothers!

The nine ladies were the talk of the town, their names were in every mouth, and though there were many who blamed Gregorics, there were also some who took his part.

"After all," they said, "who knows what ties

The Avaricious Gregorics

there were between them? Gregorics must have been a lively fellow in his youth."

And even those who defended Gregorics decided that after all there must have been some friendship between him and the nine ladies at some time or other, or why should he have remembered them in his will; but his behavior was not gentlemanly in any case, even if they were to believe the worst. In fact, in that case it was even more tactless.

"For such behavior he ought to be turned out of the club, I mean he ought to have been turned out; in fact, I mean, if he were alive he might be turned out. I assure you, if they write on his gravestone that he was an honorable man, I'll strike it out with my own pencil."

These were the words of the notary.

The captain of the fire-brigade looked at it from a different point of view.

"It is a cowardly trick," he declared. "Women only reckon until they are thirty-five years of age, and these are all old women. A little indiscretion of this kind cannot hurt them. If you breathe on a rusty bit of steel it leaves no mark. We only remove caterpillars from those trees which have flowers or leaves, or which will bear fruit, but on old, dried-up trees we leave them alone. But it is the husbands Gregorics has offended, for it is cowardly to affront people who

St. Peter's Umbrella

cannot demand satisfaction from you. And I think I may affirm with safety that Gregorics is now incapable of giving satisfaction."

The next morning István Vozáry (whose wife was one of the nine ladies mentioned in the will) appeared at the lawyer's and informed him that as his wife had never had anything to do with the dead man, she had no intention of accepting the 2000 florins. When this was known in the town, the eight remaining ladies arrived, one after the other, at the lawyer's, in order to make known to him their refusal of the legacy, as they also had nothing to do with Gregorics.

I do not know when Sztolarik had had such a lively time of it as on that day, for it was really amusing to see those wrinkled old dames, toothless and gray-haired, coming to defend their honor.

But it was even livelier for the Gregorics family, for they thus got back the 20,000 florins they had been cheated out of—that is, with the exception of the 2000 florins left to the Academy of Arts and Sciences, for, of course, the Academy accepted the legacy, though it also had had nothing to do with Gregorics. But the Academy (the tenth old woman) was not so conscientious as the other nine.

The joy of the Gregorics soon turned to bitterness, for they could not manage to find out where

The Avaricious Gregorics

the Bohemian estates were. Gáspár went off to Prague, but came back after a fruitless search. They were unable to find any papers referring to the estates; not a bill, not a receipt, not a letter was to be found.

“It was incomprehensible, such a thing had never happened before,” Boldizsár said.

They were wild with anger, and threatened Matykó and Anna to have them locked up, if they would not tell them where the estates were in Bohemia; and at length they were brought before the Court and examined. Matykó at least must know all about it, for he had travelled everywhere with his master.

So Matykó had to own that his master had never been to Bohemia at all, but had always gone to Szeged or to Kolozsvár, where Gyuri had been at school.

Oh! that sly Pál Gregorics, how he had cheated his relations! Now it was as clear as day why he had turned all his possessions into money, of course he had given it all to that boy. But *had* he given it him? How could he have trusted hundreds of thousands to a child of that age? Then, where had he put it? to whom had he given it? That was the riddle the Gregorics were trying to solve.

The lawyer, the last person who had spoken to Gregorics, declared he had not mentioned any

St. Peter's Umbrella

money, and Anna swore by Heaven and earth that she and her son had not received a kreutzer from him, and were much embittered at the fact of his leaving them without any provision. She had not a good word to say for the dead man. He had made the boy unhappy for life, spending so much on him and his education, and then leaving him totally without providing for him; so that the boy, for whom expensive professors had been kept, would now be reduced to giving lessons himself, in order to enable him to live, for the house would hardly bring in enough to pay for his keep, while attending the lectures at the University.

"Well," said Sztolarik, "if he had intended the boy to have his money, he could have given it straight into his hands, no one could prevent it."

This was quite true, and that was the very reason it seemed so strange he had not done so. The house in Vienna had been sold for 180,000 florins, the Privorec estates for 75,000, which made over a quarter of million florins. Good heavens! Where had he put it to? If he had exchanged the paper notes for gold, melted it, and eaten it by spoonfuls ever since, he could not have finished it yet.

But Gregorics had been a careful man, so the money must be in existence somewhere. It was

The Avaricious Gregorics

enough to drive one mad. It did not seem likely that Anna or the boy should have the money, nor Sztolarik, who was Gyuri Wibra's guardian; so the brothers Gregorics did not despair of finding it, and they engaged detectives to keep their eyes on Anna, and looked up a sharp boy in Pest to let them know how Gyuri lived there, and to find out from his conversation whether he knew anything of the missing money. For Gyuri had gone to Pest, to attend the University lectures, and study law. The boy sent word that Gyuri lived very simply, attended every lecture, lived at the "Seven Owls," and dined at a cheap eating-house known by the name of the "First of April." This little restaurant was mostly frequented by law students. On the daily bill of fare was the picture of a fat man speaking to a very thin man, and underneath was the following conversation:

Thin man: "How well you look; where do you dine?"

Fat man: "Why here, at the 'First of April.'"

Thin man: "Really? Well, I shall dine there too for the future."

All the same, the fare was not of the best, and perhaps the above conversation was intended to make April Fools of people. For the restaurant-keepers of olden times were frank, and even if they lied, they did it so naively, that every one saw through the lie.

St. Peter's Umbrella

Gáspár Gregorics received the following particulars as to Gyuri's mode of life:

“He breakfasts at a cheap coffee-house, attends lectures all the morning, dines at the ‘First of April,’ the afternoon he passes at a lawyer's office, copying deeds, etc., and in the evening he buys a little bacon or fried fish for supper, then goes home and studies till midnight. Every one likes him, and he will make his way in the world.”

That avaricious Gáspár Gregorics began to wish the boy had the quarter of a million after all, for he might in a few years' time marry his daughter Minka, who was just eleven.

Anna had let the house, and Sztolarik sent Gyuri thirty florins every month out of the rent.

The Gregorics divided the 18,000 florins refused by the nine ladies, among the three of them, and also the few hundreds obtained by the sale of the dead man's furniture and personal property, but the rest of the money was still missing.

The whole town was discussing the question of its whereabouts, and all sorts of silly tales were set afloat. Some said the old gentleman had sent it to Klapka, and that one day Klapka would return with it in the form of guns and cannon. Others said he had a castle, somewhere away in the woods, where he kept a very beautiful lady, and even if he had not been able to eat up his

The Avaricious Gregorics

fortune in the form of melted gold, a pretty woman would soon know how to dispose of it.

But what made the most impression on every one was, that an ironmonger appeared at Gáspár's house with a bill for a large caldron Gregorics had bought the day before his death, but had not paid for.

Gáspár gave a long whistle.

"That caldron was not among the things we sold," he said. And he went through the inventory again; but no, the caldron was not there.

"I am on the right road," thought Gáspár. "He did not buy the caldron for nothing. Consequently, what did he buy it for? Why, to put something in it of course, and that something is what we are looking for!"

Boldizsár was of the same opinion, and positively beamed with delight.

"It is God's finger," he said. "Now I believe we shall find the treasure. Pál must have buried the caldron somewhere, thinking to do us out of our rights; and he would have succeeded if he had not been so stupid as not to pay for the caldron. But luckily in cases of this kind the wrongdoer generally makes some stupid mistake."

The ironmonger remembered that it was Matykó who had chosen the caldron and taken it with him; so Gáspár one day sent for the servant, gave him a good dinner with plenty of wine, and

St. Peter's Umbrella

began to question him about Pál's last days, introducing the incident of the caldron, the bill for which the ironmonger had just sent him he said.

"What about it, Matykó," he asked. "Did your master really order it? I can hardly believe it, for what could he have wanted it for? I'm afraid you have been buying things for yourself, in your master's name."

That was the very way to make Matykó speak, to doubt his honor; and now he let out the whole story in order to clear himself. The day before his death, his master had told him to go and buy a caldron, and bring it him, together with two masons. He had done as he was told, and toward evening had taken the caldron into his master's bedroom; the masons had arrived at the same time, and had seen the caldron, so they could bear witness to the fact.

"Well, that's right, Matykó, you're a lucky fellow, for if you have two witnesses, your honor is as intact as ever, and you must consider my words as unspoken. Drink another glass of wine, and don't be offended at my suspicion; after all, it was only a natural conclusion; we could find no traces of the caldron, and the ironmonger wanted to be paid for it, and said you had taken it away. Where can it have got to?"

"Heaven only knows," answered Matykó.

The Avaricious Gregorics

"Did you never see it again?"

"Never."

"And what became of the masons? What did they come for?"

"I don't know."

Gáspár smiled pleasantly at the man.

"You are like 'John Don't-know' in the fairy tale. He always answered, 'I don't know' to everything that was asked him. Of course you don't know the two witnesses either who could establish your innocence? In that case, my good fellow, you're no better off than you were before."

"But I do know one of them."

"What is his name?"

"Oh, I don't know his name."

"Well, how do you know him, then?"

"He has three hairs at the end of his nose."

"Rubbish! He may have cut them off since then."

"I should know him all the same by his face; it is just like an owl's."

"And where did you pick up the two masons?"

"They were mending the wall of the parish church."

By degrees Gáspár Gregorics got all particulars out of the man; and now the ground seemed to be burning under his feet, so he went straight into the town to look for the man with the three hairs on his nose.

St. Peter's Umbrella

It was not difficult to find him, and at the first place he asked at, three voices answered at once:

"That must be András Prepelicza. His mustache made a mistake, and grew on the top of his nose instead of on his lip."

After that it was mere child's play, for every workman knew that Prepelicza was "building Pest," as they expressed it. He was working at a large house in the Kerepesi Street.

Gáspár immediately had the horses harnessed, and drove to Pest, not stopping till he reached the capital; and there he set to work to find Prepelicza among the Slovak workmen. The mason was just going up on a pulley to the third story when he found him, and Gáspár shuddered as he thought: "Supposing the cords were to give way now!"

"Hallo, Prepelicza!" he shouted. "Wait a bit, I was just looking for you. I want to have a talk with you."

"All right," called out the mason, examining the newcomer from above. "Come up if you want to talk."

"You come down to me, it is very important."

"Well, shout it out, I can hear it all right up here."

"I can't do that, I must speak to you in private at any cost."

"Good or bad?"

The Avaricious Gregorics

“Very good.”

“Good for me?”

“Yes, good for you.”

“Well, if it is good for me it can wait till the evening. I shall be down by then, but I want to finish this top window first.”

“Don’t argue, but come down at once. You won’t be sorry for it.”

“Why, I don’t even know who you are.”

“I’ll send you word in a minute.”

And with the next pulley he sent Prepelicza up a nice new crisp ten-florin note. The man who took it up got a florin for doing so.

At the sight of this novel visiting-card Prepelicza threw down his hammer and trowel, and with the next pulley returned to his mother earth, where miracles have been going on ever since the time of Moses.

“What can I do for you, sir?”

“Follow me.”

“To the end of the world, sir.”

“We need not go as far as that,” said Gregorics, smiling. And they only went as far as “The Cock,” a small public-house, where they ordered some wine, after drinking which, the wily Gáspár began, smiling blandly:

“Can you speak, Prepelicza?”

The mason began to wonder what was going to happen, and looked long and attentively into

St. Peter's Umbrella

the steely gray eyes of his new acquaintance, and then said guardedly:

"A jay can speak, sir."

"I am from Besztercebánya."

"Really? There are very decent people there. I seem to know your face too, sir."

"You probably mistake me for my half-brother," said Gáspár. "You know, the one who had the caldron put away so secretly."

"The caldron!" Prepelicza's mouth was wide open from astonishment. "Was that your brother? Now I understand where the likeness is, at least . . . I mean . . . (and he began to scratch his ear doubtfully). What caldron are you speaking of? I can't be expected to remember every pot and pan I have seen in my life."

Gáspár was prepared for such hitches as this, so was not surprised, and offered the mason a cigar, which he immediately wetted to make it burn slower, then lit it, and began to drum on the table like a man who has just found out that he has something to sell, and has the right purchaser before him. Now he must be as phlegmatic as possible, and the price of the article would rise in proportion.

His heart beat loud and fast, and the white cock framed on the wall above the green table seemed to awake to life before his eyes, and to crow out these words: "Good afternoon, András

The Avaricious Gregorics

Prepelicza! Cock-a-doodledo. You have luck before you! Seize hold of it!"

"What do you say, Prepelicza, you don't remember the caldron? What do you take me for? Do I look like a fool? But I daresay in your place I should do the same. This wine is very good, isn't it? What do you say? It tastes of the cask? Why, my good fellow, it can't taste of mortar, can it? Here, waiter, fetch another bottle of wine, and then be off and leave us alone. Well, what were we speaking of? Ah, yes, you said a short time ago that the jay could speak, and that is quite true; you are a wise man, Prepelicza, and the right man for me, for we shall soon come to terms. Yes, the jay can speak, but only if they cut its tongue. That is what you meant, isn't it?"

"H'm!" was the answer, and the three hairs on the mason's nose began to move, as though a breath of air had passed through them.

"I know of course that they cut the jay's tongue with a knife, but as you are not a bird, Prepelicza . . ."

"No, no," stammered the man hastily.

"Well, instead of a knife I take these two bank-notes to cut your tongue with."

And with that he took two hundred-florin bank-notes out of his pocket-book.

The eyes of the mason fixed themselves greedily upon the bank-notes, upon the two figures

St. Peter's Umbrella

printed on them, one holding a sheaf of wheat, the other a book; his eyes nearly dropped out of his head he stared so hard, and then he said:

“The caldron was heavy, very heavy indeed.”

That was all he could get out, while he continued gazing at the two cherubs on the paper notes. He had six of his own at home, but they were not as pretty as these.

“Well, my good man,” said Gregorics surprised, “still silent?”

“It would be like a stone on my heart if I were to speak,” sighed the mason—“a very big stone. I don’t think I could bear it.”

“Don’t talk such nonsense! A stone, indeed! Why, you have had to do with nothing else all your life, you need not cry about having one on your heart! You can’t expect me to give you two hundred florins, and then give you a hot roll to carry in your heart. Don’t be a fool, man.”

Prepelicza smiled at this, but he put his big red hands behind his back, a sign that he did not intend to touch the money.

“Perhaps you find it too little?”

Not a word did he answer, only pushed his hair up in front, till he looked like a sick cockatoo; then, after a few moments, raised his glass to his lips, and drained it to the dregs, and then put it back on the table so brusquely that it broke.

“It is disgraceful!” he burst out; “a poor

The Avaricious Gregorics

man's honor is only worth two hundred florins, though God created us all equal, and He gave me my honor as well as to the bishop or to Baron Radvánszky. And yet you tax mine at two hundred florins. It's a shame!"

Upon that Gáspár decided to play his trump.

"Very well, Prepelicza, you needn't be so cross. If your honor is so dear, I'll look for cheaper."

And with that he put back the two bank-notes in his pocket.

"I'll look up your companion, the other mason."

Then he called the head waiter, in order to pay for the wine. Prepelicza smiled.

"Well, well, can't a poor man give his opinion? Of course you can look up the other man, and he won't be as honest as I, probably. But . . . well, put another fifty to it, and I'll tell you all."

"Very well. It's a bargain!"

And the mason began to relate the events of that memorable night, and how they had carried the caldron through the courtyard and garden to a small house.

"To the 'Lebanon'!" exclaimed Gáspár excitedly. "To that boy's house!"

And the mason went on to tell how Gregorics had stood by while they had walled in the caldron, and watched every movement, Gáspár throwing in a question now and then.

St. Peter's Umbrella

"Was it heavy?"

"Very heavy."

"Did no one see you as you passed through the courtyard?"

"No one; every one had gone to bed."

Gáspár was quite excited, and seemed to enjoy every word he heard; his eyes shone, his thoughts were occupied with the future, in which he imagined himself a rich man, the owner of untold wealth. He might even buy a baronetcy! Baron Gáspár Gregorics! How well it sounded! And Minka would be a little baroness. That fool of a Pál had not known how to make proper use of his wealth, so it must have increased immensely, he had been so economical!

"And what did my brother pay you for your work?"

"He gave us each fifty florins."

"That was quite right of him."

A weight had fallen from his heart at these words, for he had begun to fear Gregorics had given them some thousands to buy their silence, and that would have been a great pity, as it would have diminished the sum he hoped to possess before long. For he had decided to buy "Lebanon," with its caldron and its orchard. He would go to-morrow to that boy's guardian and make an offer for it. And he rejoiced inwardly at the trick he was playing his brother and sister.

The Avaricious Gregorics

He returned home as fast as horses could take him, and did not even stop at his own house, but went straight on to Sztolarik's and informed him he would like to buy "Lebanon."

This was the name they had given to the orchard and house old Gregorics had bought of the clergyman's widow. He had tried to grow cedars there at first, but the soil of Besztercebánya was not suitable for these trees, and the sarcastic inhabitants of the small town christened the orchard "Lebanon."

Mr. Sztolarik showed no surprise at the offer.

"So you want to buy 'Lebanon'?" he said. "It is a good orchard, and produces the finest fruit imaginable. This year a well-known hotel-keeper bought all the fruit, and paid an enormous price for it. But what made you think of buying 'Lebanon'?"

"I should like to build a house there, a larger house than the present one."

"H'm! There is always a good deal of bother attached to a purchase of that kind," said Sztolarik coldly; "the present owner is a minor, and the Court of Chancery must give permission for the sale to take place. I would rather leave things as they are. When the boy is of age he may do what he likes, but if I sell it now he may be sorry for it later on. No, no, Mr. Gregorics, I can't agree to it. After all the house and orchard are

St. Peter's Umbrella

a *pretium affectionis* for the boy; he spent his childhood there."

"But if I offer a good sum for it," broke in Gáspár, nervously.

Sztolarik began to feel curious.

"What do you consider a good sum? What do you think of offering for it?"

"Why, I would give—" and here he was overcome by a fit of coughing, which made him turn as red as a peony—"I would give 15,000 florins."

Well, that was a brilliant offer, for Pál Gregorics had bought it of the clergyman's widow for 5000 florins. It was only a small bit of ground, and a good way from the market, which decreased its value exceedingly.

"Utcumque," said Sztolarik, "your offer is a good one. But, but . . . well, I'll tell you what, Mr. Gregorics, I'll consider your offer a bit, and I must write to the boy about it too, and also speak to his mother."

"But I want to settle it as soon as possible."

"I'll write about it to-day."

Gáspár did not wish to say any more about the matter, for fear of awakening the lawyer's suspicions, but a day or two afterward he sent a tiny cask of Tokay wine to him (some Pál Gregorics had left in his cellar, and which they had divided among them), with the inquiry as to whether he had any answer from Budapest. Sztolarik sent

The Avaricious Gregorics

back word he expected a letter every minute, and thanked him very much for the wine; he also remarked to the footman who had brought it that he hoped it would go smoothly, but whether he meant the wine, or something else, the footman did not quite understand.

Hardly had the man gone, when the expected letter arrived, containing the news that Gyuri agreed to the sale of the orchard, and Sztolarik was just going to send one of his clerks to Gáspár, when the door opened, and in walked Boldizsár Gregorics, puffing and blowing from the haste he had made.

“Pray take a seat, Mr. Gregorics. To what do I owe the honor of your visit?”

“I’ve brought you a lot of money,” gasped Boldizsár, still out of breath.

“We can always do with plenty of that,” said the lawyer.

“I want to buy that poor orphan’s little bit of property, ‘Lebanon.’”

“‘Lebanon’?” repeated Sztolarik, surprised. “What on earth is the matter with them all?” he muttered to himself; then continued out loud: “Perhaps you want it for your brother?”

“No, no, I want it for myself. It would suit me nicely; the view from there is so lovely, and the fruit-trees are so good.”

“It is really strange, very strange!”

St. Peter's Umbrella

"Why is it strange?" said the other, surprised.

"Because I have already one purchaser in view."

"Well, we won't let him have it. I daresay I can offer you more than he."

"I doubt it," said the lawyer; "the first offer was 15,000 florins."

Boldizsár showed no surprise.

"Well, I offer 20,000."

Not till after he had said it did it occur to him that the orchard was not worth even 15,000 florins, and he turned impatiently and asked:

"Who is the fool who offers so much?"

"Your brother Gáspár."

At this name Boldizsár turned deathly pale, and dropped gasping on to a chair. His lips moved, but no sound came from them, and Sztolarik thought he would have a stroke, and rushed out for some water, calling for help as he went; but when he returned with the cook armed with a rolling-pin and a jug of water, the old gentleman had recovered, and began to excuse himself.

"I felt a bit giddy; I often have attacks like this. I'm getting old, you see. And now to return to our discussion. Yes, I'll give you 20,000 florins for 'Lebanon,' and pay the money down."

The lawyer thought a minute, then said:

"We can't manage things so quickly, for we

The Avaricious Gregorics

must have the consent of the Court of Chancery. I'll see about it at once."

And he was as good as his word, for such an advantageous sale of the orchard he had never dared to hope for. But all the time he was wondering why the two Gregorics were so anxious to have it. There must be some reason for it. Supposing they had struck upon some treasure there, it was not impossible, for had not King Arpád and his successors lived about here? He decided to send István Drotler, the civil engineer, to have a look at the place, and see if it contained gold or coal. But before he had time to start for the engineer's, Gáspár Gregorics appeared on the scene, to ask if there were any letter from Pest. Sztolarik was in difficulties.

"The letter is here, yes, the letter is here; but something else has happened. Another purchaser has turned up, and he offers 20,000 florins for 'Lebanon.'"

This was evidently a great blow for Gáspár.

"Impossible," he stammered. "Is it Boldizsár?"

"Yes."

Gáspár was furious; he began to swear like a trooper, and waved his stick about, thereby knocking down one of Mrs. Sztolarik's flower-pots, in which a rare specimen of hyacinth was just blossoming.

St. Peter's Umbrella

"The wretch!" he hissed. And then he sat staring fixedly in front of him for some time.

How did he get to know of it? was the question he was revolving in his mind. It was very simple. That sly Prepelicza had easily found out in Besztercebánya that Pál Gregorics had more than one brother living, and he decided that if one of them paid him 250 florins for the secret, the other would perhaps be inclined to pay something too. So he got into the train, travelled to Besztercebánya, and looked up Boldizsár. There was nothing surprising in that except, perhaps, the fact that Prepelicza was not such a fool as he looked.

"Oh, the wretch!" Gáspár kept on saying. "But he shall not have it, I *will* buy it. I'll give you 25,000 florins for it."

Sztolarik smiled and rubbed his hands.

"It will belong to the one who gives most for it. If it were mine, I would give it you for the 15,000 florins you offered at first, for I always keep my word. But as it belongs to a minor, and I have his interests at heart, I must do the best I can for him. Now don't you think I am right?"

Gáspár agreed with him, and tried to make him promise to give him the preference. But what was the good of it? Sztolarik met Boldizsár that evening at the club, and made no secret of the fact that Gáspár had been to see him that morn-

The Avaricious Gregorics

ing, and offered him 5000 florins more for the orchard. But Boldizsár was not surprised, and only answered:

“Well, I will give 30,000.”

And this mad auction went on for days, until the attention of the whole town was drawn to it, and people began to think the Gregorics must have gone mad, or that there must be some important reason for their wishing to have possession of “Lebanon.”

Gáspár came and offered 32,000 florins, and as soon as Boldizsár heard of it, he came and offered 3000 florins more; and so on, until people’s hair began to stand on end.

“Let them go on as long as they like,” thought the lawyer.

And they did go on, until they reached the sum of 50,000 florins, which was Boldizsár’s last offer. And heaven only knows how long it would have gone on still.

The engineer had been to look at the place, and had declared there was nothing of any value to be found there, not even a bit of gold, unless it were the stoppings of some dead woman’s teeth.

“But supposing there is coal there?”

“Not a sign of it.”

“Then what on earth are the Gregorics thinking of?”

Whatever the reason was, it was certainly to

St. Peter's Umbrella

Gyuri's advantage, and his guardian meant to make the most of the opportunity, so he let the two brothers go on bidding till the sum promised was 50,000 florins. He intended to wait till Gáspár capped it with 52,000, and then close the bargain.

But he had reckoned without his host, for one fine day it suddenly occurred to Gáspár it was strange Mrs. Panyóki showed no signs of taking part in the auction. She evidently knew nothing of the existence of the treasure; Prepelicza had not told her the secret, and had thus proved himself a clever man, for if he had told her too, his part in the play was over. Whereas now, when the two brothers had the caldron in their possession, they would be obliged to pay him hush-money to hold his tongue. As Gáspár turned all this over in his mind, he began to find it ridiculous for him and Boldizsár to keep on outbidding each other, thus attracting every one's attention to them, putting money into the boy's pocket, and awakening Mrs. Panyóki's suspicions. And whichever bought "Lebanon" at last would certainly not be left to enjoy it unmolested. So he decided it would be cheaper if they were to work together, buy the estate, share the contents of the caldron, and pay Prepelicza a certain sum yearly to hold his tongue.

So one day the brothers came to terms, and

The Avaricious Gregorics

Sztolarik was very surprised when, the next day, the door opened, and in walked Boldizsár and announced that he had thought things over, and come to the conclusion that "Lebanon" was decidedly not worth 50,000 florins, and he had given up all idea of buying it.

"That does not matter," said Sztolarik, "your brother will give us 48,000 for it."

And he waited impatiently till he had a chance of speaking to Gáspár about it. But that good man calmly answered:

"It was very stupid of me to offer so much for it, and I am really grateful to you, Sztolarik, for not taking me at my word at once. Why, I can buy a good-sized estate for the money I offered for it."

The lawyer hardly knew what to do next. He was afraid he had made them go back on their bargain, by letting them carry it on so long, and felt sure he would be the laughing stock of the town, and that Gyuri would reproach him with not looking after his interests properly. So off he rushed to Boldizsár and offered him "Lebanon" for 45,000 florins; but Boldizsár only laughed, and said:

"Do you take me for a fool?"

Whereupon he went to Gáspár and said:

"Well, you may have 'Lebanon' for 40,000 florins."

St. Peter's Umbrella

Gáspár shook his head and answered:

"I'm not quite mad yet."

And now the auction began again, but this time it went *backward*, until at last, with the greatest difficulty, Sztolarik got 15,000 florins out of them. They bought it together, and both signed their names to the deeds.

On the day they received the key of the house from the guardian, they both went there, shut themselves in, and began to pull down the inner wall with the pickaxes they had brought with them under their cloaks. Of course they found the caldron, but what was in it has not become clear to this day, though that was the chief point to be settled in the Gregorics lawsuit, which took up the attention of the Besztercebánya law courts for ten years.

It began in this way. A few months after the purchase of "Lebanon," Prepelicza appeared on the scene, and demanded his share of the treasure discovered in the wall, otherwise he would make known the whole affair to Mrs. Panyóki. The brothers got mad with rage at the sight of him.

"You miserable thief!" they cried. "You were a party to the fraud practised upon us by that good-for-nothing brother of ours, who wanted to rob us in order to benefit that boy. You helped him to fill the caldron with rusty nails

The Avaricious Gregorics

and bits of old iron. Now you are here, you may as well have your share."

With that they each seized hold of a stick, and began to beat Prepelicza till he was black and blue. Off he went to a doctor for a certificate as to his wounds, and then to the barber, who had to write a long letter to the king in his name, complaining of the behavior of the two brothers Gregorics toward one of his honest (?) subjects.

"If the king is not ashamed of them as subjects, I am not ashamed of owning how I have been beaten; they were two to one!"

Then he hired a cart (for it was impossible for him to walk in his present state), and drove to Varecska, where Mrs. Panyóki spent the summer, and told her the whole tale from beginning to end.

The result was the lawsuit Panyóki *versus* Gregorics, which furnished the neighborhood with gossip for ten years. A whole legion of witnesses had to be examined, and the deeds and papers increased to such an extent that at the end they weighed seventy-three pounds. Mrs. Panyóki could only prove the existence of the caldron, its having been walled in, and its appropriation later on by the two brothers, who, on their part, tried to prove that it contained nothing of value, only a number of rusty nails and odd bits of iron. As the dead man had no lawyer to defend him,

St. Peter's Umbrella

he lost the lawsuit, for it was certain he had played the trick on his relations, and thus brought about the lawsuit, which only ended when it was all the same which side lost or won it, for the seventy-three pounds of paper and the six lawyers had eaten up the whole of the Gregorics and Panyóki fortunes. By degrees all the members of the family died in poverty, and were forgotten; only Pál Gregorics lived in the memories of the six lawyers, who remarked from time to time: "He was a clever man!"

But in spite of all researches, the dead man's fortune was still missing, not a trace of it was to be found, no one had inherited it except rumor, which did as it liked with it, decreased it, increased it, placed it here or there at pleasure.

Traces

PART III

CHAPTER I.

THE UMBRELLA AGAIN.

MANY years passed, and things had changed very much in Besztercebánya, but the thing that will interest us most is the door-plate on the house formerly inhabited by old Gregorics, on which is to be read: "György Wibra, lawyer."

Yes, little Gyuri is now a well-known lawyer; people come to him from all sides for advice, and young girls smile at him from their windows as he passes. He is a very handsome young man, and clever. He has youth and health, and his whole life before him, what more can he want? But the narrow-minded inhabitants of the little town are at present only occupied with one question, viz., whom will he marry? Why, Katka Krikovszky would marry him any day, and she is the prettiest girl in the town. Then there is Mathilda Hupka, who would receive him with open arms if he came to her with a proposal, though she is very high and mighty. And even

St. Peter's Umbrella

Mariska Biky would not refuse him, and she belongs to the nobility, and has 50,000 florins. Girls are very cheap nowadays! But Gyuri Wibra paid no attention to any of them; he was a serious and retiring young man, and his friends soon saw that he was infinitely above them in every way. As a rule young men first take their diploma, then start an office, look out for clients who do not come, and by their absence make the place seem so large and empty, that the young lawyer feels he must have company of some kind. So he brings home a wife to cheer his solitude.

But it never occurred to Gyuri to marry. And once when Mrs. Krikovszky broached the subject to him and asked when they would hear of his engagement, he answered absently:

“I am not in the habit of marrying.”

It certainly is a bad “habit,” but one that does not seem inclined to go out of fashion. For thousands of years people have been marrying, repenting of it, and considering it madness to have done so, but they never get over the madness, and marriage is as fashionable as ever. As long as pretty young girls are growing up, they are always growing up for some one.

Gyuri's business was a brilliant success from the beginning; fortune smiled on him from every side, but he received it with a tolerably sour face. He worked, but only from habit, just the same

The Umbrella Again

as he washed himself and brushed his hair every day. His mind was elsewhere; but where? His friends thought they knew, and often asked him:

“Why don’t you marry, old fellow?”

“Because I am not rich enough.”

“Why, that is the very reason you should marry. Your wife will bring the money with her.”

(That is the usual opinion of young men.)

Gyuri shook his head, a handsome, manly head, with an oval face, and large black eyes.

“That is not true. It is the money brings the wife!”

What sort of a wife had he set his heart on? His friends decided he must be chasing very high game. Perhaps he wanted a baroness, or even a countess? He was like the Virginian creeper they said, which first climbs very high and then blossoms. But if he were to marry, he could be successful later on all the same. Look at the French beans; they climb and blossom at the same time.

But this was all empty talk. There was nothing whatever to prevent Gyuri getting on in his profession; nothing troubled him, neither a pretty girl’s face, nor a wish for rank and riches, only the legend of the lost wealth disturbed him. For to others it was a legend, but to him it was truth, which danced before his eyes like a Jack-o’-

St. Peter's Umbrella

lantern; he could neither grasp it nor leave it alone; yet there it was by day and by night, and he heard in his dreams a voice saying: "You are a millionaire!"

When he wrote out miserable little bills for ten or fifteen florins, these words seemed to dance before him on the paper:

"Lay down your pen, Gyuri Wibra, you have treasures enough already, heaven only knows how much. Your father saved it up for you, so you have a right to it. You are a rich man, Gyuri, and not a poor lawyer. Throw away those deeds and look for your treasure. Where are you to look for it? Why, that is just the question that drives one mad. Perhaps sometimes, when you are tired out, and throw yourself down on the ground to rest, it may be just beneath you, it is, perhaps, just beginning to get warm under your hand when you take it away to do something else, and it may be you will never find it at all. And what a life you could lead, what a lot you could do with the money. You could drive a four-in-hand, drink champagne, keep a lot of servants. A new world, a new life would be open to you. And to possess all this you only need a little luck; but as you have none at present, take up your pen again, my friend, and go on writing out deeds and bills, and squeezing a few florins out of the poor Slovaks."

The Umbrella Again

It was a great pity he had heard anything about the missing treasure. He felt it himself, and often said he wished he knew nothing about it, and would be very glad if something were to happen which would go to prove that the treasure did not really exist; for instance, if some one would remark:

“ Oh, yes, I met old Gregorics once in Monte Carlo; he was losing his money as fast as he could.”

But no such thing happened; on the contrary, new witnesses were always turning up to assure him: “ Old Gregorics must certainly have left an immense fortune, which he intended you to have. Don't you really know anything about it?”

No, he knew nothing at all about it, but his thoughts were always running on the subject, spoiling all his pleasure in life. The promising youth had really become only half a man, for he had two separate and distinct persons in him. Sometimes he entirely gave himself up to the idea that he was the child of a servant, and began to feel he had attained to a really good position by means of his own work, and was happy and contented in this thought. But only a word was needed to make the lawyer a totally different man. He was now the son of rich old Pál Gregorics, waiting to find and take possession of his property. And from time to time he suffered all the

St. Peter's Umbrella

pangs of Tantalus, and left his office to look after itself for weeks at a time, while he went to Vienna to look up some of his father's old acquaintances.

The rich carriage-builder, who had bought Gregorics's house in Vienna, gave him valuable information.

"Your father," he said, "once told me when I paid him for the house, that he should put the money in some bank, and asked me which would be the best and safest way to set to work about it."

Gyuri wandered then from one bank to another, but without success. Thoroughly worn out he returned to Besztercebánya with the full intention of not thinking any more about the subject.

"I am not going on making a fool of myself," he said. "I won't let the Golden Calf go on lowing in my ears forever. I will not take another step in the affair, and shall imagine I dreamed it all."

But it was easier said than done. You can throw ashes on a smouldering fire—it will put it out, but not prevent it smoking.

Sometimes one friend referred to it, sometimes another. His mother, who now walked on crutches, often spoke of the good old times, sitting in her arm-chair by the fire. And at length she owned that old Gregorics had wanted to telegraph for Gyuri on his deathbed.

"He seemed as though he could not die till he

The Umbrella Again

had seen you," she said. "But it was my fault you came too late."

"And why did he so much want to see me?"

"He said he wanted to give you something."

A light broke in upon Gyuri's brain. The Vienna carriage-builder had given him to understand that his father's fortune was represented by a receipt for money placed in a bank, and from the information his mother now gave him, he concluded that the old gentleman had intended giving him the receipt before his death. So he must always have kept it by him. But what had become of it? In which bank was the money deposited? Could he, knowing what he did, give up the idea of finding it?

No, no, it was impossible! It could not be lost! Why, a grain of wheat, if dropped in a ditch, would reappear in time, however unexpectedly. And in a case of this kind, a chance word, a sign, could clear up every doubt.

He had not long to wait. One day, the dying mayor of the town, Tamás Krikovszky, sent for him to make his will. Several people, holding high positions in the town, were assembled in the room. There lay the mayor, pale and weak, but he still seemed to retain some of the majesty of his office, in the manner in which he took leave of his inferiors in office, recommending the welfare of the town to them, and then taking from

St. Peter's Umbrella

under his pillow the official seal, he put it into their hands, saying:

“For twenty years I have sealed the truth with it!”

Then he dictated his will to Gyuri, and while doing so, referred now and then to various incidents in his life.

“Dear me, what times those were,” he said once, addressing himself to Gyuri. “Your father had a red umbrella, with a hollow handle, in which he used to carry valuable papers from one camp to another, in the days when he was a spy.”

“What!” stammered Gyuri. “The red umbrella?” and his eyes shone.

Like a flash of lightning a thought had entered his head. The receipt was in that umbrella! His blood began to course madly in his veins, as the certitude of the truth of his suspicion grew upon him. Yes, there it was, he was sure of it; and all at once he remembered the incident in Szeged, how Gregorics had let his umbrella fall in the water, his anxiety, and offer of a large reward for its discovery. Then again, the old gentleman's words rang in his ear:

“The umbrella will once belong to you, and you will find it useful to protect you from the rain.”

The bystanders could not imagine why Gyuri seemed so much put about at the mayor's death;

The Umbrella Again

in their opinion it was quite right of the old man to take his departure, he had dragged on with his gouty old leg quite long enough, and should now make room for younger men; he had not lived his life for nothing, for were they not going to have his portrait painted and hung in the Town Hall, a grand ending to his life? If he lived for ten years longer he could have no greater honor done him, and his portrait would be even uglier than now.

They were even more surprised at the strange question which Gyuri, in spite of the solemnity of the occasion, put to the dying man.

“And was the hole big, sir?”

“What hole?” asked the mayor, who had already forgotten the subject.

“The hole in the handle of the umbrella.”

“I really don’t know, I never asked Gregorics.”

He closed his eyes, and in a weak voice added, with that phlegma which only a Hungarian displays on his deathbed:

“But if you wait a bit, I’ll ask him.”

And he probably kept his promise, for half an hour later a black flag was flying from the roof of the Town Hall, and the bell of the Roman Catholic church was tolling.

Gyuri Wibra had hurried home, nervous and excited, and was now marching up and down his office, his heart beating wildly with joy.

St. Peter's Umbrella

"I have the treasure at last!" he kept on repeating to himself, "at least, I should have it if I had the umbrella. But where is it?" He could neither eat, nor drink, nor sleep till he had settled it. He questioned his mother on the subject, and she did her best to answer him, but could only repeat:

"How am I to remember that, my dear boy, after so long a time? And what do you want that ragged umbrella for?"

Gyuri sighed.

"If I have to dig it out of the ground with my ten fingers, I will do it."

"Perhaps Matykó will remember something about it?"

Matykó was soon found; he sat smoking his pipe in the anteroom of the office, for he was now Gyuri's servant. But he also said he had forgotten far more important things than that in all these years; but this much he did remember, that the dead man had kept the umbrella near him till the hour of his death.

"Heaven only knows," he added, "why he took such care of the ragged old thing."

(Not only heaven knew the reason now, but Gyuri too!)

He got more information from the old woman who kept the grocer's shop in old Gregorics's house; she had been in the house when he died, and had helped to lay him out. She swore by

The Umbrella Again

heaven and earth that the umbrella had been tightly clutched in the dead man's hand, and they had had the greatest difficulty in freeing it from his grasp.

"Yes," said the old woman, "the umbrella was certainly in his hand, may I never move from this spot if it is not true."

"It is all the same," muttered Gyuri; "we want to know where it is now."

"I suppose it was sold with the rest of the things."

That seemed very likely, so Gyuri went and looked up the list of things that had been sold at the auction. All sorts of things were mentioned—tables, chairs, cupboards, coats, etc.—but there was no mention of an umbrella. He read it over ten times, but it was of no use, he could find no mention of it, unless the following could be considered as such.

"Various useless objects, bought for two florins by the white Jew."

Perhaps the umbrella was one of those useless objects, and had been bought by the "white Jew." Well, the first thing was to find the "white Jew." But who was he? For in those good old days there were not as many Jews in Hungary as there are now; there were perhaps one or two in the town, so it was easy to find them; for one was called "red," another "gray," another "white,"

St. Peter's Umbrella

a fourth "black," according to the color of their hair; and by means of these four colors the townsfolk were able to distinguish any Jew who lived in their town. But now there were some hundred Jewish families, and heaven had not increased the shades of their hair to such an extent that each family could be distinguished in the old way.

It was not difficult to find out about the old Jew, and Gyuri soon knew that he was called Jónás Müncz, and it was very likely he had bought the things, for all the coats and vests found their way into his tiny shop in Wheat Street, before starting on the second chapter of their existence.

Many people remember the little shop in which top-boots, cloaks, and dresses hung on nails, and the following announcement was written with chalk on the door:

"Only the lilies of the field can dress themselves cheaper than you can in this shop!"

(That was quite true, only with this difference, that the lilies of the field were more becomingly dressed than Müncz's customers.)

In spite of all this information Gyuri was by no means satisfied, so he walked across the road to his old guardian's to see if he could find out anything more on the subject from him, for he had been the first lawyer in the town for many years, and must know every one.

The Umbrella Again

The young man told Sztolarik the whole story, openly and frankly, adding that the receipt for the money, which was probably deposited in some foreign bank, was all but found, for it was most certainly in the handle of the red umbrella, and that had in all probability been bought by an old Jew of the name of Jónás Müncz. All of this Gyuri poured out quickly and breathlessly into the ears of his old guardian.

“That much I know. Now, what am I to do next?”

“It is a great deal, much more than I ever hoped for. You must continue the search.”

“But where am I to search? We don’t yet know where Müncz is, and even if we had him, who knows on which dust-heap the umbrella has rotted since then?”

“All the same, you must not lose the thread.”

“Did you know the ‘white Jew’?”

“Oh, yes; he was a very honest Jew, that is why he never got very rich. He often came to me; I can see him now, with his head bald at the back, and a fringe of white hair round it. ‘Pon my word! (and here the lawyer skipped like a young lamb) the last time I saw him he had Pál Gregorics’s umbrella in his hand; I can swear to it, and I remember I joked him about it. ‘It seems to me, Jónás,’ I said, ‘that you wander about the next world, too, to buy “ole clo’,” and

St. Peter's Umbrella

bought that umbrella there of Pál Gregorics.' At which he smiled, and said he had not gone as far as that yet, for he only kept to the two counties of Zólyom and Hont, and had divided the neighboring counties among his sons; Móricz had Trencsin and Nyitra, Számi had Szepes and Liptó, and the youngest, Kóbi, had only last week been given Bars, but they none of them intended to go into the next world until they were obliged to."

Gyuri's eyes shone with delight.

"Bravo, Sztolarik!" he exclaimed, "only the gods had such memories as you have."

"You are a lucky fellow, Gyuri. I have an impression we are on the right track at last, and that you will find the money."

"I begin to think so too," answered Gyuri, who was in turns optimist or pessimist, as the occasion presented itself.

"But what can have become of old Müncz?"

"We Christians have a legend about the Jews which says, that on the Long Day every year a Jew disappears from the earth and is never seen again. Old Jónás disappeared thus fourteen years ago (you may be sure none of the Rothschilds will disappear in that way). His wife and children waited for him in vain, Jónás never returned. So his sons set out to look for him, and it turned out the old fellow had got soft-headed, and had taken to wandering about in the Slovak villages,

The Umbrella Again

where the sons now and then heard of him from people who had seen him; and then one day, they found his dead body in the Garam."

The young lawyer's face was clouded again.

"Why, in that case the umbrella will be in the Garam too, probably."

"Perhaps not," was the answer. "He may have left it at home, and if so, it will still be among the old rags and bones of the Müncz's, for I am sure no one would ever buy it. Try your luck, my boy! If I were you I would get into a carriage, and drive and drive until . . ."

"But where am I to drive to?"

"Yes, of course, of course."

Then, after a minute's thought:

"Müncz's sons have gone out into the world, and the boxes of matches with which they started have probably become houses since then. But I'll tell you what; go to Bábaszék, their mother lives there."

"Whereabouts is Bábaszék?"

"Quite near to Zólyom, among the mountains. There is a saying that all the sheep there were frozen to death once, in the dog-days."

"And are you sure Mrs. Müncz lives there?"

"Quite sure. A few years ago they came and fetched her away to be the 'Jewess of Bábaszék.'"

CHAPTER II.

OUR ROSALIA.

YES, they had taken old Mrs. Müncz to Bábaszék to be their "Jew," with forty florins salary, for they had no Jew there, and had to find one at any cost.

This is how it came to pass (and it is difficult for an inhabitant of Budapest to understand it). Bábaszék was one of those small towns which in reality was only a larger village, though it rejoiced in what it called its "mayor," and on one day in the year a few miserable horses, cows, and pigs were driven in from the neighboring farms and villages, and the baker from Zólyom put up a tent, in which he sold gingerbread in the shape of hearts, of soldiers, of cradles, all of which was soon bought up by the young men and fathers of families and taken home to sweethearts or children, as the case might be. In one word, there was a fair at Bábaszék. And for centuries every inhabitant has divided the year and its events into two parts, one before the fair. and

Our Rosalia

one after it. For instance, the death of Francis Deák took place just two days after the fair at Bábaszék. And the reason of all this was, that the old kings of Hungary who lived during the hunting season in the castles of Zólyom and Végles, instead of making grants to the inhabitants, raised the villages to the position of towns.

Well, of course, it was a privilege, for in a town everything seems grander than in a village, and is worth a good deal more, even man himself. The little straw-thatched house in which questions of moment are discussed is called the Town Hall, and the "hajdu" (town-servant) must know how to beat a drum (for the town has a drum of its own), the richer ones even have a small fire-engine. After all, position is position, and one must do all one can to keep it up. Zólyom and Tót-Pelsöc were rivals.

"That's not a town," said the latter of the former; "why, they have not even a chemist there!" (Well, after all, not every village or town can be as big as Besztercebánya or London!)

Pelsöc could not even leave poor little Bábaszék alone.

"That is no town," they said. "There is not even a single Jew there. If no Jew settle in a town, it cannot be considered as such; it has, in fact, no future."

But it is not my intention now to write about

St. Peter's Umbrella

the quarrels of two small towns, I only want to tell you how Mrs. Müncz came to live in Bábaszék.

Well, they sent word to her in Besztercebánya, to come and take possession of the little shop just opposite the market-place near the smithy, the best position in the town. On either side of the door was written in colored letters: "Soap, whips, starch, scrubbing-brushes, nails, salt, grease, saffron, cinnamon, linseed oil;" in fact, the names of all those articles which did not grow in the neighborhood, or were not manufactured there. So that is how Mrs. Müncz came to live in Bábaszék, where she was received with great honors, and made as comfortable as possible. It is a wonder they did not bring her into the town in triumph on their shoulders, which would have been no joke, for she weighed at least two hundredweight.

Some of the townsfolk were very discontented that the mayor had only brought a Jewess into the town, and not a Jew, for it would sound grander if they could say: "Our Jew says this, or our Móricz or Tobias did that," than if they had said: "Our Rosália says this, that, or the other;" it sounds so very mild. They would have liked a Jew with a long beard, and hooked nose, and red hair if possible; that was the correct thing!

But Mr. Konopka, the cleverest senator in the town, who had made the contract with Mrs.

Our Rosalia

Müncz, and who had even gone himself to fetch her and her luggage from Besztercebánya with two large carts, the horses of which had flowers and rosettes on, coldly repudiated these aspersions on their Jewess, with an argument which struck as heavily as the stones in David's sling.

"Don't be so foolish," he said. "If a woman was once king in Hungary, why should not a Jewess fill the place of Jew in Bábaszék?"

(This was a reference to the words of the nation addressed to Maria Theresa: "We will fight for our 'king' and our country.")

Of course they soon saw the truth of this, and ceased grumbling; and they were in time quite reconciled to their Jewess, for every year, on the Feast of Tents, all Mrs. Müncz's sons, seven in number, came to see their mother, and walked about the market-place in their best clothes, laced boots, and top-hats. The townsfolk were glad enough then, their hearts swelled with pride as they gazed at the seven Jews, and they would exclaim:

"Well, if this is not a town, what is?"

"You won't see as many Jews as that in Pelsöc in ten years," answered another proudly.

Old Mrs. Müncz feasted her eyes on her sons when she sat, as she usually did, in the doorway of her shop, her knitting in her hands, her spectacles on her nose (those spectacles lent her an additional

St. Peter's Umbrella

charm in the eyes of her admirers). She was a pleasant-looking old woman in her snow-white frilled cap, and seemed to suit her surroundings, the whitewashed walls of the neighboring houses, the important-looking Town Hall, and no one could pass her without raising their hat, just as they did before the statue of St. John Nepomuk. (Those were the only two things worth seeing in Bábaszék.)

Every one felt that the little old woman would have her share in the success of the town.

"Good-morning, young woman. How are you?"

"Very well, thank you, my child."

"How is business, young woman?"

"Thank you, my child, I get on very well."

They were all glad, oh, so glad, that the "young woman" was so healthy and strong, and that she got richer day by day; they boasted of it wherever they went.

"Our Rosália is getting on well. It is easy to get on in Bábaszék, we are good-natured people."

They really made things very comfortable for Rosália. She was over seventy, but they still called her "mlada pani" (young woman). As the king reserves to himself the right of conferring various titles, so the people have adopted the plan of conferring the "title of youth," and make use of it when and where they like.

Our Rosalia

Well, as I said before, they took great care of Rosália, and when, a few years after her arrival there, she decided to build a stone house, every one who owned a cart placed it at her disposal, for the carting of stones, sand, wood, etc.; the bricklayers gave a day's work without wages; only one or two of the lazier ones did not join the rest on that day, but were sent to Coventry for it.

“Good-for-nothing fellows,” said every one, “they have no respect for any one, neither for God, the priest, nor a Jew!”

Their respect went so far as to make them (at the mayor's instigation) set apart two pieces of ground, one for a (future) synagogue, and one for a Jewish burial-ground (for the one Jewess they had in the town). But what did that matter? They had the future before them, and who could tell what it held for them? And it was so nice to be able to say to strangers: “Just a stone's throw from the Jewish burial-ground,” or “near to the foundation of the Synagogue,” etc. And the inhabitants of the villages round about would say when the good folks turned their backs: “Poor things! Their brains have been turned with the joy of having a Jew in their town!”

CHAPTER III.

THE TRACES LEAD TO GLOGOVA.

ONE fine spring afternoon, a light sort of dog-cart stopped before Mrs. Müncz's shop, and a young man sprang out of it, Gyuri Wibra, of course.

Rosália, who was just standing at her door, speaking to Mr. Mravucsán, the mayor, and Mr. Galba, one of the senators, immediately turned to the young man with the question:

"What can I do for you, sir?"

"Are you Mrs. Müncz?"

"Yes, sir."

"I want to buy an umbrella."

The two gentlemen, surprised, looked up at the cloudless sky.

"What the devil does he want to buy an umbrella for?" muttered Mravucsán.

Then added aloud:

"Where are you from, sir?"

"From Besztercebánya."

Mravucsán was even more surprised.

The Traces Lead to Glogova

Fancy any one coming all the way from Besztercebánya to Bábaszék to buy an umbrella! How proud he was it had happened under his mayorship! He nudged Galba:

“Do you hear?” he said.

“This is only a small village shop, sir,” answered Rosália. “We don’t keep umbrellas.”

“Pity enough!” muttered Mravucsán, biting savagely at his mustache.

“But I heard,” went on the stranger, “that you had second-hand umbrellas to sell.”

Second-hand umbrellas! Well, what next!

Mravucsán, who was asthmatic, began to breathe heavily, and was just going to say something disparaging to the stranger, when some runaway horses attracted his attention, as they rushed across the market-place, dragging a handsome phaeton with them.

“That will never be fit for use again,” said the smith, as he stood looking on, his hands folded under his leather apron.

The phaeton had probably been dashed against a wall, for the left side was smashed to bits, the shaft was broken, one of the wheels had been left somewhere on the road, and the reins were dragging on the ground between the two horses.

“They are beautiful animals,” said Galba.

“They belong to the priest of Glogova,” answered Mravucsán. “I’m afraid some one

St. Peter's Umbrella

may have been thrown out of the carriage; let us go and see."

During this time the number of customers in Mrs. Müncz's shop had increased, and as they had to be attended to, she first turned to the stranger before serving them, and said:

"There are a lot of old umbrellas somewhere on the loft, but they would not do for a fine gentleman like you."

"I should like to look at them all the same."

Mrs. Müncz had her hand on the door to let her customers in, and only answered without turning round:

"I can assure you you would not take them in your hand."

But the young man was not to be put off so easily; he followed her into the shop, and waited till the customers were all served, then remarked again that he would like to see the umbrellas.

"But, my good sir, don't bother me about the umbrellas. I tell you they would be of no use to you. They are some that were left from the time of my poor husband; he knew how to mend umbrellas, and most of these are broken and torn, and they certainly will not have improved, lying on the dusty loft so long. Besides, I cannot show you them, for my son is at the fair, the servant

The Traces Lead to Glogova

has a bad foot and cannot move, and when there is a fair my shop is always full, so I cannot leave it to go with you."

The young lawyer took a five-florin note out of his pocket.

"I don't want you to do it for nothing, Mrs. Müncz, but I must see the umbrellas at any price. So let me go up alone to the loft, and please take this in return for your kindness."

Mrs. Müncz did not take the money, and her small black eyes examined the young man suspiciously.

"Now I shall certainly not show you the umbrellas."

"And why not?"

"My poor dead husband used to say: 'Rosália, never do anything you don't understand the reason of,' and my husband was a very clever man."

"Of course, of course, you are quite right, and can't understand why I offer five florins for an old ragged umbrella."

"Just so; for five florins you might see something better."

"Well, it is very simple after all. My father had a very old umbrella, to which he was much attached, and I heard that it had come by chance into your husband's hands, and I should very much like to have it as a souvenir."

St. Peter's Umbrella

"And who was your father, sir? Perhaps I may have heard of him."

The lawyer blushed a little.

"Pál Gregorics," he said.

"Ah, Gregorics! Wait a bit! Yes, I remember, the funny little man in whose will"

"Yes, yes. He left 2000 florins to nine ladies in Besztercebánya."

"I remember, but I don't think he was"

"Yes no of course not I mean" and here he stopped in confusion.

"I am Gyuri Wibra, lawyer."

Now it was Mrs. Müncz's turn to be confused.

"Of course, sir, I understand. How stupid of me! I have heard of you, sir, and I knew your poor father; dear me, how very like him you are, and yet so handsome. I knew him *very* well," she added, smiling, "though he did not leave me 2000 florins. I was an old woman when he was still young. Well, sir, please go up and look at the umbrellas. I will show you the way, and tell you just where to look for them. Follow me, please, and I hope you will find the old gentleman's umbrella."

"I would give you fifty florins for it, Mrs. Müncz."

At the words "fifty florins" the old woman's eyes shone like two glowworms.

"Oh! what a good son!" she sighed, turning

The Traces Lead to Glogova

her eyes up to heaven. "There is nothing more pleasing to God than a good son, who honors the memory of his father."

She got quite active and lively at the thought of the fifty florins, and shutting the door of the shop, she tripped across the yard with Gyuri to the ladder of the loft, and even wanted to go up with him herself.

"No, no, stay down below, Mrs. Müncz. What would the world say, if we two were to go up to the loft together?" said Gyuri jokingly.

Old Rosália chuckled.

"Oh, dear heart alive!" she said, "there's no danger with me. Why, your father didn't even remember me in his will, though once upon a time . . . (and here she complacently smoothed her gray hair). Well, my dear, please go up."

Gyuri Wibra searched about among the rubbish on the loft for quite half an hour, during which time the old woman came twice to the foot of the ladder to see if he were coming down. She was anxious about the fifty florins.

"Well?" she asked, as he appeared at last empty-handed.

"I have looked through everything," he said, in a discouraged tone, "but the umbrella I want is not among the others."

The old Jewess looked disappointed.

"What can that tiresome Jónás have done with

St. Peter's Umbrella

it?" she exclaimed. "Fifty florins! Dreadful! But he never had a reason for anything he did."

"In all probability your husband used that umbrella himself. Mr. Sztolarik of Besztercebánya says he distinctly remembers seeing him with it once."

"What was it like?"

"The stuff was red, with patches of all sorts on it, and it had a pale green border. The stick was of black wood, with a bone handle."

"May I never go to heaven!" exclaimed Rosália, "if that was not the very umbrella he took with him last time he left home! Yes, I know he took that one!"

"It was a great pity he took just that one."

Rosália felt bound to defend her husband.

"How was he to know that?" she said. "He never had a reason for anything he did."

"Well, there's no help for it now," sighed Gyuri, as he stood on the last rung of the ladder, wondering what he was to do next, and feeling like Marius among the ruins of Carthage, only there were not even ruins to his Carthage; all hopes had returned to the clouds from which they had been taken.

Slowly he walked through the shop to his dog-cart, which was waiting outside, and the old woman waddled after him, like a fat goose. But once out in the street, she suddenly seemed to

The Traces Lead to Glogova

wake up, and seized hold of the lawyer's coat.

“Wait a bit. I had nearly forgotten it, but my son Móricz, who is a butcher in Ipolyság, was here at the time; he had come to buy oxen, I remember. My son Móricz knows everything, and may I never go to heaven (Rosália evidently had a strong objection to leaving this world) if he can't throw some light on the subject. Go to the fair, my dear boy, to the place where the sheep stand, and speak to the handsomest man you see there, that will be my son Móricz; he's handsome, very handsome, is Móricz. Speak to him, and promise him the fifty florins. I am sure he once told me something about that umbrella. For when my poor dear Jónás died, Móricz went to look for him, and when he found traces of him, he went from village to village making inquiries, till everything was clear. (Here Rosália gazed tearfully heavenward.) Oh, Jónás, Jónás, why did you treat us so? If your senses had left you, why must you follow them? You had enough sons who would have taken care of you!”

She would have gone on like this all day, if Gyuri had not stepped into his dog-cart and driven off to the scene of the fair as she had advised him.

After putting a few questions to the bystanders, he found Móricz Müncz, a short, stout man, his

St. Peter's Umbrella

pock-marked face looking like a turkey's egg. He was as ugly as a Faun. His butcher's knife and steel hung from a belt round his waist, and on his arm was tattooed the head of an ox.

He was just bargaining for a cow, and its owner, a tanner, was swearing by heaven and earth that such a cow had never been seen in Bábaszék before.

"It will eat straw," he assured him, "and yet give fourteen pints of milk a day!"

"Rubbish!" answered Móricz. "I'm not a calf, and don't intend to look upon this cow as my mother. I'm a butcher, and want to kill it and weigh it."

"That's true," said the honest tanner; and of his own free will he lowered the price by five florins.

Móricz did not seem to think that enough, and began poking at the ribs of the cow.

"What bones!" he exclaimed, and then pulled open its mouth to look at its teeth. "Why, it has not got a tooth in its head!"

"What do you want it to have teeth for?" asked the honest tanner. "I don't suppose you want to weigh its teeth too?"

"But it kicks!"

"Well, it won't kick once it is killed; and I don't suppose you want to weigh it before it is killed?"

The Traces Lead to Glogova

The honest tanner laughed at his own wit, which had put him into such a good humor, that he again took five florins off the price. But Móricz was not yet satisfied, for he still gazed at the cow, as though trying to find more faults in her. And just at that moment Gyuri Wibra called out:

“Mr. Müncz, I should like to have a word with you.”

The tanner, fearing to lose his purchaser, took five florins more off the price, and Móricz, being a sensible man, at once struck the bargain; he always bought of an evening from such as had not been able to sell their cattle during the day, and gave it for a low price to save their having to drive it home again.

“What can I do for you, sir?”

“I should like to buy something of you, which belongs neither to you nor to me.”

“There are plenty of things in the world answering to that description,” said Móricz, “and I can assure you, I will let you have it as cheap as possible.”

“Let us move on a bit.”

Gyuri led him out of the crowd to the village pump, near which grew an elder-tree. This tree, round which they had put some palings, was also a part of the future greatness of Bábaszék, for the green, evil-smelling insects which housed in

St. Peter's Umbrella

its branches, and which are used in various medicines (Spanish flies), induced them to believe that they might, once upon a time, have a chemist in Bábaszék. The young girls of the town used to collect the insects, and sell them to the chemist at Zólyom for a few kreutzers; but that was forbidden now, for the people had decided: "Near that tree there will once be a chemist's shop, so we will not have the insects taken away."

They evidently considered them the foundation of the future chemist's store.

Gyuri told the Jew what he wanted; that he was interested in his father's favorite umbrella, and would buy it if he could find it. Did Móricz know anything about it?

"Yes, I do," was the disappointed answer, for now he knew what a trifle it was, he saw the price fall in proportion.

"I will give you fifty florins for any information that will lead to its discovery."

Móricz quickly took off his cap, which until now he had not considered it necessary to remove. Fifty florins for an old umbrella! Why, this young man must be the Prince of Coburg himself from Szent-Antal! Now he noticed for the first time how very elegantly he was dressed.

"The umbrella can be found," he said; and then added more doubtfully, "I think."

"Tell me all you know."

The Traces Lead to Glogova

“Let me see, where shall I begin? It is now about fourteen years since my father disappeared, and I have forgotten most of the details, but this much I remember, that I started to look for him with my brother Sámi, and in Podhrágy I found the first trace of him, and following this up, I was told that when there he was still quite in his right mind, had sold a few trifles to the villagers, slept at the inn, and had bought a very old seal from a certain Ráksányi for two florins. He must have had all his senses about him then, for when we took him out of the Garam, he had the seal in his coat pocket, and we sold it for fifty florins to an antiquary, as it turned out to be the seal of Vid Mohorai, of the time of King Arpád.”

“Yes, but these particulars have nothing to do with the subject in question,” interrupted the young man.

“You will see, sir, that they will be useful to you.”

“Well, perhaps so; but I don’t see what they have to do with the umbrella.”

“You will see in time, if you will listen to the rest of my tale. I heard in Podhrágy that he went from there to Abelova, so I went there too. From what I heard, I began to fear that my father was beginning to lose his senses, for he had always inclined toward melancholy. Here they told us that he had bought a lot of ‘Angel Kreutzers’

St. Peter's Umbrella

(small coins, on which the crown of Hungary is represented, held by two angels; they were issued in 1867, and many people wear them as amulets, and believe they bring luck) from the villagers for four kreutzers each; but later on I found I was mistaken in my surmise."

"How was that? Was he not yet mad?"

"No, for a few days later, two young Jews appeared in Abelova, each bringing a bag of 'angel kreutzers,' which they sold to the villagers for three kreutzers each, though they are really worth four."

"So it is possible . . ."

"Not only possible, but certain, that the two young cheats had been told by the old man to buy up all the 'angel kreutzers' they could, and he thus became their confederate without knowing it. So it is very probable he may have been mad then, or he would have had nothing to do with the whole affair. From Abelova he went through the Vízoka Hor forest to Dólinka, but we could find out nothing about his doings, though he spent two days there. But in the next village, Sztrecsnyó, the children ran after him, and made fun of him, like of the prophet Elijah, and he, unfastening his pack (not the prophet Elijah, but my poor father), began throwing the various articles he had for sale at them. In fifty years' time they will still remember that day in Sztrecsnyó, when soap,

The Traces Lead to Glogova

penknives, and pencils fell among them like manna from heaven. Since then it is a very common saying there: 'There was once a mad Jew in Sztrecsnyó.' "

" Bother Sztrecsnyó, let us return to our subject."

" I have nearly done now. In Kobilnyik my poor old father was seen without his pack; in one hand he had his stick, in the other his umbrella, with which he drove off the dogs which barked at him. So in Kobilnyik he still had his umbrella you see."

Tears were rolling down Móricz's pock-marked face, his heart was quite softened at the remembrance of all these incidents.

"After that we looked for a long time for traces of him, but only heard of him again in Lehota. One stormy summer night he knocked at the door of the watchman's house, the last in the village, but when they saw he was a Jew, they drove him away. They told me he had neither a hat nor an umbrella then, only the heavy, rough stick he used to beat us with when we were children."

" Now I begin to understand the drift of your remarks. You want to show that the umbrella was lost between Kobilnyik and Lehota."

" Yes."

" But that proves nothing, for your father may have lost it in the wood, or among the rocks, and

St. Peter's Umbrella

if any one found it, they would probably make use of it to put in the arms of a scarecrow."

"No, that is not it, I know what happened. I heard it by chance, for I was not looking for the umbrella; what did I care for that! I wanted to find my father. Well, among the Kvet mountains I met a tinker walking beside his cart, a very chatty man he seemed to be. I asked him, as I did every one we met, if he had not seen an old Jew about there lately. 'Yes,' he answered, 'I saw him a few weeks ago in Glogova during a downpour of rain; he was spreading an umbrella over a child on the veranda of a small house, and when he had done so he moved on.'"

The lawyer sprang up hastily.

"Go on," he cried.

"There is nothing more to tell, sir. But from the description the tinker gave me, I am sure it was my father, and, besides, Glogova lies just between Lehota and Kobolnyik."

"Well, you have given me valuable information," exclaimed the lawyer, and, taking a fifty-florin note out of his pocketbook, he added: "Accept this as a slight return for your kindness. Good-by."

And off he went like a hound which has just found the scent; over some palings he vaulted, in order to get to his cart as quickly as possible.

The Traces Lead to Glogova

On he raced, but as he passed the gingerbread stall, Móricz Müncz stood before him again.

"Excuse me for running after you," he exclaimed breathlessly, "but it suddenly occurred to me that I might give you a word of advice, which is this. There are a good many people from Glogova here at the fair, so you really might get the crier to go round and find out if they know anything of the umbrella. If you would promise a reward for any information, in an hour's time you will have plenty, I am sure. In a small village like Glogova, every one knows everything."

"It is quite unnecessary," replied the lawyer, "for I am going to Glogova myself. Thanks all the same."

"Oh, sir, it is I who have to thank you; you have behaved in a princely fashion. Fifty florins for such a trifle! Why, I would have done it for one florin."

The lawyer smiled.

"And I would willingly have given a thousand, Mr. Müncz."

And with that he walked away, past the stall where they were selling nuts, and onions tied up in strings. Móricz stood gazing after him till he was out of sight.

"A thousand florins!" he repeated, shaking his head. "If I had only known!"

And off he went, driving his cow before him.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EARRING.

FROM the inn opposite Schramek's house lively sounds proceeded. I beg pardon, I ought to call it "hotel," at least, that is the name the inhabitants of Bábaszék delighted in giving it, and the more aristocratic of them always patronized it in preference to the other inns. The gypsies from Pelsöc were there, and the sound of their lively music could be heard far and wide through the open windows. Handsome Slovak brides in their picturesque dresses, with their pretty white head-gear, and younger girls with red ribbons plaited into their hair, all run in to join the dance, and if the room is too full, late-comers take up their position in the street and dance there.

But curiosity is even stronger than their love of dancing, and all at once the general hopping and skipping ceases, as János Fiala, the town-servant and crier, appears on the scene, his drum hung round his neck and his pipe in his mouth. He stops in front of the "hotel," and begins to

The Earring

beat his drum with might and main. What can have happened? Perhaps the mayor's geese have strayed? Ten or twelve bystanders begin to ply him with questions, but Fiala would not for the world take his beloved pipe out of his mouth, nor would he divulge state secrets before the right moment came. So he first of all beat his drum the required number of times, and then with stentorian voice, shouted the following:

"Be it known to all whom it may interest, that a gold earring, with a green stone in it (how was he to know it was called an emerald?), has been lost, somewhere between the brickfield and the church. Whoever will bring the same to the Town Hall will be handsomely rewarded."

Gyuri paused a moment at the sound of the drum, listened to the crier's words, and then smiled at the look of excitement on the peasant girls' faces.

"I wouldn't give it back if I found it," said one.

"I'd have a hairpin made of it," said another.

"Heaven grant me luck!" said a third, turning her eyes piously heavenward.

"Don't look at the sky, you stupid," said another; "if you want to find it look at the ground."

But as chance would have it, some one found it who would rather not have done so, and that some one was Gyuri Wibra. He had only walked

St. Peter's Umbrella

a few steps, when a green eye seemed to smile up at him from the dust under his feet. He stooped and picked it up; it was the lost earring with the emerald in it. How tiresome, when he was in such a hurry! Why could not one of those hundreds of people at the fair have found it? But the green eye looked so reproachfully at him, that he felt he could not give way to his first impulse and throw it back into the dust, to be trampled on by the cattle from the fair. Who wore such fine jewelry here? Well, whoever it belonged to, he must take it to the Town Hall; it was only a few steps from there after all.

He turned in at the entrance to the Town Hall, where some watering-cans hung from the walls, and a few old rusty implements of torture were exhibited (*sic transit gloria mundi!*), went up the staircase, and entered a room where the Senators were all assembled round a green baize-covered table, discussing a serious and difficult question.

A most unpleasant thing had happened. One of the watchmen in the Liskovina wood (the property of the town) had arrived there breathlessly not long before, with the news that a well-dressed man had been found hanging on a tree in the wood; what was to be done with the body?

This was what was troubling the worthy Senators, and causing them to frown and pucker their foreheads. Senator Konopka declared that the

The Earring

correct thing to do was to bring the body to the mortuary chapel, and at the same time give notice of the fact to the magistrate, Mr. Mihály Géry, so that he could tell the district doctor to dissect the body.

Galba shook his head. He was nothing if not a diplomat, as he showed in the present instance. He said he considered it would be best to say nothing about it, but to remove the body by night a little further on, to the so-called Kvaka Wood, which was in the Travník district, and let *them* find the body. Mravucsán was undecided which of the two propositions to accept. He hummed and hawed and shook his head, and then complained it was hot enough to stifle one, that he had gout in his hand, and that one leg of the Senators' table was shorter than the others. This latter was soon remedied by putting some old deeds under the short leg. Then they waited to see which side would have the majority, and as it turned out it was on Galba's side. But the Galba party was again subdivided into two factions. The strict Galba faction wanted the dead man's body transported to the Travník district. The moderated Galba faction, headed by András Kozsehuba, would have been contented with merely taking down the body, and burying it under the tree; they wanted, at all costs, to prevent its being carried through the village to the

St. Peter's Umbrella

cemetery, which would certainly be the case if the magistrate were informed of the circumstances. For if a suicide were carried through a place, that place was threatened with damage by hail!"

"Superstitious rubbish!" burst out Konopka.

"Of course, of course, Mr. Konopka, but who is to help it if the people are so superstitious?" asked Senator Fajka, of the Kozsehuba faction.

Konopka wildly banged the table with his fat, be-ringed hand, upon which every one was quiet.

"It is sad enough to hear a Senator say such a thing! I can assure you, gentlemen, that the Lord will not send His thunder-clouds in our direction just on account of that poor dead body. He will not punish a thousand just men because one unfortunate man has given himself to the devil, especially as the dead man himself would be the only one not hurt by the hail!"

Mravucsán breathed freely again at these wise words, which certainly raised one's opinion of the magistrates; he hastened to make use of the opportunity, and as once the tiny wren, sitting on the eagle's wings, tried to soar higher than the eagle, so did Mravucsán try to rise above the Senators.

"What is true is true," he said, "and I herewith beg to call your attention to the fact that there is nothing to be feared from hail if we bring the body through the town."

The Earring

Up sprang Mr. Fajka at these words.

“That is all the same to us,” he said; “if matters stand so, let us have hail by all means, for when once all the villagers are insured by the Trieste Insurance Company, I see no difference whether there is hail or not. In fact, it would be better if there were some, for, if I know the villagers well, they will immediately go and insure the harvest far beyond its worth if the dead body is taken through the village. So the hail would not be such a great misfortune, but the carriage of the corpse through the village would be.”

He was a grand debater after all, that Senator Fajka, for he had again hit the right nail on the head, and at the same time enlightened the Galba and the Kozsehuba factions.

“What a brain!” they exclaimed.

The word brain reminded Galba of the dissecting part of the business—per *associationem idearum*—and he at once began to discuss the point.

“Why dissect the man? We know who he is, for it is as plain as pie-crust that he is an agent for some Insurance Company, and has hanged himself here in our neighborhood in order to make people insure their harvest. It’s as clear as day!”

“You are mad, Galba,” said Konopka crossly.

Upon which the Senators all jumped up from

St. Peter's Umbrella

their places, and then the noise broke forth, or, as Fiala, the town-servant and crier, used to say, "they began to boil the town saucepan," and every eye was fixed on the mayor, the spoon which was to skim the superfluous froth. But the mayor drew his head down into the dark blue collar of his coat, and seemed quite to disappear in it; he gnawed his mustache, and stood there helplessly, wondering what he was to say and do now, when all at once the door opened, and Gyuri Wibra stood before them. In spite of all folks may say, the powers above always send help at the right moment.

At sight of the stranger, who, an hour or two before, had wanted to buy an old umbrella of Mrs. Müncz, the mayor suddenly pushed back his chair and hurried toward him (let the Senators think he had some important business to transact with the new arrival).

"Ah, sir," he said hurriedly, "you were looking for me, I suppose?"

"If you are the mayor, yes."

"Of course, of course!" (Who else could be mayor in Bábaszék but Mravucsán, he wondered?)

"They have been crying the loss of an earring, and I have found it. Here it is."

The mayor's face beamed with delight.

"Now that is real honesty, sir. That is what

The Earring

I like. This is the first earring that has been lost since I have been in office, and even that is found. That's what I call order in the district."

Then turning to the Senators, he went on:

"It is only an hour since I sent the crier round the town, and here we have the earring. They couldn't manage that in Budapest!"

Just then he noticed that the stranger was preparing to leave.

"Why, you surely don't mean to leave us already, sir? There is a reward offered for the finding of this earring."

"I do not want the reward, thank you."

"Oh, come, don't talk like that, young man, don't run away from luck when it comes in your way. You know the story of the poor man who gave his luck away to the devil without knowing it, and how sorry he was for it afterward?"

"Yes, he was sorry for it," answered the lawyer, smiling, as he remembered the fable, "but I don't think we can compare this case with that."

"I am sure you have no idea to whom the earring belongs?"

"Not the slightest. Whose is it?"

"It belongs to the sister of the Glogova priest."

Gyuri screwed up his mouth doubtfully.

"Don't be too quick in your conclusions; just come here a minute; you won't repent it."

"Where am I to go?"

St. Peter's Umbrella

"Come into the next room."

The mayor wanted to keep him there at any cost, so as to gain time before deciding as to the dead man's future.

"But, my dear sir, I have important business to get through."

"Never mind, you must come in for a minute," and with that he opened the door and all but pushed the young man into the other room.

"My dear young lady," he called out over Gyuri's shoulder, "I have brought you your earring!"

At these words a young girl turned from her occupation of putting cold-water bandages on the shoulder of an elderly lady, lying on a sofa. Gyuri was not prepared for this apparition, and felt as confused and uncomfortable as though he had committed some indiscretion. The elder woman, partly undressed, was lying on a sofa, her wounded right shoulder (a remarkably bony one) was bare. The young man at the door stammered some apology, and turned to go, but Mravucsán held him back.

"Don't go," he said, "they won't bite you!"

The young girl, who had a very pretty attractive face, hastened to throw a cloak over her companion, and sprang up from her kneeling position beside the lady. What a figure she had!

The Earring

It seemed to Gyuri as though a lily, in all its simple grandeur, had risen before him.

“This gentleman has found your earring, and brought it you back, my dear.”

A smile broke over her face (it was as though a ray of sunlight had found its way into the mayor's dark office), she blushed a little, and then made a courtesy, a real schoolgirl courtesy, awkward, and yet with something of grace in it.

“Thank you, sir, for your kindness. I am doubly glad to have found it, for I had given up all idea of ever seeing it again.”

And taking it in her hand she gazed at it lovingly. She was a child still, you could see it in every movement. Gyuri felt he ought to say something, but found no suitable words.

This child disconcerted him, but there was something delightful in her artless manner which quite charmed him. There he stood, helpless and speechless, as though he were waiting for something. Was it the reward he wanted? The silence was getting painful, and the position awkward. At last the girl saw that the young man did not move, so she broke the silence.

“Oh dear! I had nearly forgotten in my delight that I had offered . . . I mean . . . how am I to say it?”

It now occurred to Gyuri that she was offering

St. Peter's Umbrella

him the reward, so he thought it time to make known his name.

"I am Dr. Wibra," he said, "from Besztercebánya."

"Oh, how lucky!" exclaimed the girl, clapping her hands gleefully. "We are just in want of a doctor for poor madame."

This little misunderstanding was just what was wanted. Gyuri smiled.

"I am very sorry, my dear young lady; I am not a doctor of medicine, but a doctor of law."

The young girl looked disappointed at this announcement, and blushed a little at her mistake; but Mravucsán was quite excited.

"What's that I hear? You are young Wibra, the noted lawyer? Well, that is nice! Who would have thought it? Now I understand. Of course, you are here to try and find out particulars about one of your cases. I might have thought of it when I met you at Mrs. Müncz's. Of course a gentleman like you must have some special reason for buying an old umbrella. Well, the fates must have sent you here now, for we are discussing such a very difficult question in the next room, that our minds are too small for it. How strange, Miss Veronica, that your earring should be found by such a renowned lawyer."

Veronica stole a look at the "renowned lawyer," and noticed for the first time how handsome

The Earring

he was, and how gentlemanly, and her heart began to beat at the thought that she had nearly offered him the five florins reward.

Mravucsán hastened to offer the lawyer a chair, and cast an anxious look round his office, and remarked with horror what an untidy state it was in; deeds lying about everywhere, coats and cloaks, belonging to the Senators, empty glasses and bottles, for they were in the habit of drinking a glass now and then when they had settled some particularly important business, which was quite right of them, for the truth that emanated from them must be replaced by a fresh supply, and as the Hungarians say: "There is truth in wine."

The sight of that office would really have discouraged Mr. Mravucsán if his eye had not at that moment fallen on the portrait of Baron Radvánszky, the lord lieutenant of the county, hanging on the wall in front of him. That, after all, lent some distinction to the room. He wished from his heart that the baron were there in person to see what an illustrious guest they were harboring. But as the baron was not present, he felt it devolved on him to express his satisfaction at the fact.

"I am a poor man," he said, "but I would not accept a hundred florins in place of the honor that is done to my poor office to-day. It is worth

St. Peter's Umbrella

something to have the most renowned lawyer in the county, and the prettiest young lady . . ."

"Oh, Mr. Mravucsán!" exclaimed Veronica, blushing furiously.

"Well," said Mravucsán, "what's true is true. One need not be ashamed of being pretty. I was good-looking myself once, but I was never ashamed of it. Besides, a pretty face is of great use to one, isn't it, Mr. Wibra?"

"Yes, it is a very lucky thing," answered Gyuri quickly.

Mravucsán shook his head.

"Let us simply say it is a great help, for luck can easily turn to misfortune, and misfortune to luck, as was the case now, for if it had not been for to-day's accident, I should not now have the pleasure of seeing you all here."

"What is that?" asked Gyuri. "An accident?"

Veronica was going to answer, but that talkative mayor put in his word again.

"Yes, there was an accident, but in a short time there will be no traces of it, for the earring is here, madame's shoulder is here, it will be blue for some days, but what the devil does that matter, it is not the color makes the shoulder. And the carriage will be all right, too, when the smith has mended it."

"So those horses that were running away with a broken carriage . . .?"

The Earring

“Were ours,” said Veronica. “They took fright near the brickfield, the coachman lost his hold of the reins, and when he stooped to gather them up, he was thrown out of the carriage. In our fright we jumped out too. I did not hurt myself, but poor madame struck her shoulder on something. I hope it will be nothing serious. Does it hurt very much, Madame Krisbay?”

Madame opened her small yellow eyes, which till then had been closed, and the first sight that met them was Veronica’s untidy hair.

“Smooth your hair,” she said in French in a low voice, then groaned once or twice, and closed her eyes again.

Veronica, greatly alarmed, raised her hand to her head, and found that one of her plaits was partly undone.

“Oh, my hair!” she exclaimed. “The hairpins must have fallen out when I jumped out of the carriage. What am I to do?”

“Let down the other plait,” advised Mravuc-sán. “That’s it, my dear; it is much prettier so, isn’t it, Wibra?”

“Much prettier,” answered Gyuri, casting an admiring glance at the two black, velvety plaits, with a lovely dark bluish tinge on them, which hung nearly down to the edge of her millefleurs skirt.

So that was the priest’s sister. He could hardly

St. Peter's Umbrella

believe it, for he had imagined a fat, waddling, red-faced woman, smelling of pomade. That is what parish priests' sisters are generally like. The lawyer thought it was time to start a conversation.

"I suppose you were very frightened?"

"Not very; in fact, I don't think I was startled at all. But now I begin to fear my brother will be anxious about me."

"The priest of Glogova?"

"Yes. He is very fond of me, and will be so anxious if we do not return. And yet I hardly know how we are to manage it."

"Well," said Mravucsán, consolingly, "we have the horses, and we will borrow a cart from some one."

Veronica shuddered and shook her head.

"With those horses? Never again!"

"But, my dear young lady, you must never take horses seriously, they have no real character. You see, this is how it was. Near the brickfield there is that immense windmill, for of course every town must have one. The world is making progress, in spite of all Senator Fajka says. Well, as I said, there is the windmill. I had it built, for every one made fun of us because we had no water in the neighborhood. So I make use of the wind. Of course, the horses don't understand that; they are good mountain horses,

The Earring

and had never seen a beast with such enormous wings, turning in the air, so of course they were frightened and ran away. You can't wonder at it. But that is all over now, and they will take you quietly home."

"No, no, I'm afraid of them. Oh, how dreadful they were! If you had only seen them! I won't go a step with them. As far as I am concerned, I could walk home, but poor Madame Krisbay . . ."

"Now that would be a nice sort of thing to do," remarked Mravucsán. "Fancy my allowing my best friend's little sister to walk all the way home with those tiny feet of hers! How she would stumble and trip over the sharp stones in the mountain paths! And his reverence would say: 'My friend Mravucsán is a nice sort of fellow to let my sister walk home, after all the good dinners and suppers I have given him.' Why, I would rather take you home on my own back, my dear, right into Glogova parish!"

Veronica looked gratefully at Mravucsán, and Gyuri wondered, if it came to the point, would Mravucsán be able to carry out his plan, or would he have to be carried himself. The mayor was an elderly man, and looked as though he were breaking up. He found himself glancing curiously at the old gentleman, measuring his strength, the breadth of his chest, and of his

St. Peter's Umbrella

shoulders, as though the most important fact now were, who was to take Veronica on his back. He decided that Mravucsán was too weak to do it, and smiled to himself when he discovered how glad this thought made him.

Mravucsán's voice broke in upon his musings.

"Well, my dear," he was saying, "don't you worry yourself about it; take a rest first, and then we will see what is to be done. Of course it would be better to have other horses, but where are we to get them from? No one in Bábaszék keeps horses, we only need oxen. I myself only keep oxen. For a mountain is a mountain, and horses are of no use there, for they can, after all, only do what an ox can, namely, walk slowly. You can't make a grand show here with horses, and let them gallop and prance about, and toss their manes. This is a serious part, yes, I repeat it, a serious part. The chief thing is to pull, and that is the work of an ox. A horse gets tired of it, and when it knows the circumstances it loses all pleasure in life, and seems to say: 'I'm not such a fool as to grow for nothing, I'll be a foal all my life.' And the horses round about here are not much bigger than a dog, and are altogether wretched-looking."

He would have gone on talking all night, and running the poor horses down to the ground, if Gyuri had not interrupted him.

The Earring

"But I have my dog-cart here, Miss Veronica, and will take you home with pleasure."

"Will you really," exclaimed Mravucsán. "I knew you were a gentleman. But why on earth didn't you say so before?"

"Because you gave me no chance to put in a word edgeways."

"That is true," laughed Mravucsán good-humoredly. "So you will take them?"

"Of course, even if I were not going to Glogova myself."

"Are you really going there?" asked Veronica, surprised.

"Yes."

She looked at him thoughtfully for a minute, and then said:

"Don't try to deceive us."

Gyuri smiled.

"On my word of honor, I intended going to Glogova. Shall we all go together?"

Veronica nodded her head, and was just going to clap her hands like the child she was, when madame began to move on the sofa, and gave a deep sigh.

"Oh dear," said Veronica, "I had quite forgotten madame. Perhaps after all I can't go with you."

"And why not? The carriage is big enough, there will be plenty of room."

St. Peter's Umbrella

"Yes, but may I?"

"Go home? Who is to prevent it?"

"Why, don't you know?"

"What?" asked Gyuri, surprised.

"Why, etiquette, of course," she said shyly.

(Gyuri smiled. Oh, what a little simpleton she was!)

"Yes, yes," she assured them, seeing they were laughing at her, "it says in the book on etiquette: 'You must not accept the arm of a stranger.'"

"But a carriage is not an arm," burst out Mravucsán. "How could it be? If it were, I should have two carriages myself. My dear child, leave etiquette to look after itself. In Bábaszék I decide what is etiquette, not the French *mam-selles*. And *I* say a carriage is not an arm, so there's an end of it."

"Of course you are right, but all the same, I must speak to madame about it."

"Just as you like, my dear."

Veronica again knelt down by the sofa, and a whispered conversation ensued, the result of which was, as Gyuri understood from the few words he could hear, that madame quite shared Mravucsán's view of the case, that a carriage is not an arm, and that if two people have been introduced to each other, they are not strangers, and consequently, in Madame Krisbay's opinion, they ought to accept the young man's offer.

The Earring

Besides, in times of danger there is no such thing as etiquette. Beautiful Blanche Montmorency on the occasion of a fire was saved by the Marquis Privadière with nothing on but her nightgown, and yet the tower of Notre Dame is still standing!

Gyuri felt as impatient as a card-player when the cards are being dealt, and a large stake has been placed on one of them, until at length Veronica turned round.

"We shall be very thankful if you will take us in your carriage," she said, smiling, as she was sure Blanche Montmorency would have done under the same conditions.

Gyuri received the announcement with delight.

"I will go and see after the carriage," he said, taking up his hat. But Mravucsán stood in his way.

"Oh, no, you don't," he said. "*Pro primo*, even if Veronica can go, I am sure Madame Krisbay cannot start yet; it would be a sin to make her drive now; she must rest a bit first, after her fright and her bruises. If my wife puts some of her wonderful plaster on it to-night, she'll be perfectly well in the morning. *Pro secundo*, you can't go because I won't allow you to. *Pro tertio*, because it is getting dark. Please look out of the window."

He was right; the sun had disappeared behind the dark blue lines of the Zólyom Hills, and the

St. Peter's Umbrella

fir-trees in front of the Town Hall cast their long shadows down the road, right up to the Mravucsán garden, where a lean cat was performing its evening ablutions among the oleanders. All the same Gyuri began to plead (it was part of his business).

"It will be a quiet, warm night," he said. "Why should we not start? After all it can make no difference to madame whether she groans in bed or in the carriage."

"But it will be dark," objected Mravucsán, "and there are some very bad bits of road between here and Glogova, and two or three precipices. In spite of my being mayor, I cannot order moonlight for you."

"We don't need it; we can light the lamps."

Veronica seemed undecided, and glanced from one to the other of the gentlemen, till at length Mravucsán put in the finishing touch.

"There will be a storm to-night, for there is the dead body of a man hanging on a tree in the wood you have to pass through."

Veronica shuddered.

"I would not go through that wood by night for anything," she exclaimed.

That settled the question. Gyuri bowed, and received a bright smile in return, and Mravucsán rushed into the next room, and told Konopka to take his place (oh, his delight at getting rid of

The Earring

his responsibility!), as he had visitors, and had no time to think of other things; and then he whispered in the ears of some of the Senators (those who had on the best coats) that he would be pleased to see them to supper. Then off he trotted home, to announce the arrival of visitors, and give orders for their reception. On the staircase he caught sight of Fiala, and sent him to tell Wibra's coachman, who was waiting with the dog-cart outside Mrs. Müncz's shop, to go and put up in his courtyard.

After a few minutes, Mrs. Mravucsán appeared at the Town Hall to take the ladies home with her. She was a short, stout, amiable woman, whose broad, smiling face spoke of good temper and kindheartedness. She was dressed like all women of the middle class in that part, in a dark red skirt and black silk apron, and on her head she wore a black silk frilled cap.

She entered the room noisily, as such simple village folks do.

"Well, I never!" she exclaimed. "Mravucsán says you are going to be our guests. Is it true? What an honor for us! But I knew it, I felt it, for last night I dreamed a white lily was growing out of my basin, and this is the fulfilment of the dream. Well, my dear, get all your things together, and I'll carry them across, for I'm as strong as a bear. But I forgot to tell you the

St. Peter's Umbrella

most important thing, which I really ought to have said at the beginning: I am Mrs. Mravucsán. Oh, my dear young lady, I should never have thought you were so pretty! Holy Virgin! Now I understand her sending down an umbrella to keep the rain off your pretty face! So the poor lady is ill, has hurt her shoulder? Well, I've got a capital plaster we'll put on it; come along. Don't give way, my dear, it has to be borne. Why, I had a similar accident once, Mravucsán was driving too. We fell into a ditch, and two of my ribs were broken, and I've had trouble with my liver ever since. Such things will happen now and then. Does it hurt you very much?"

"The lady does not speak Slovak," said Veronica, "nor Hungarian."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Mravucsán, clasping her hands. "So old, and can't even speak Hungarian! How is that?"

And Veronica was obliged to explain that madame had come direct from Munich to be her companion, and had never yet been in Hungary; she was the widow of a French officer, she added, for Mrs. Mravucsán insisted on having full particulars. They had received a letter from her the day before yesterday, saying she was coming, and Veronica had wanted to meet her at the station.

"So that is how it is. And she can't even

The Earring

“speak Slovak nor Hungarian! Poor unhappy woman! And what am I to do with her?—whom am I to put next her at table?—how am I to offer her anything? Well, it will be a nice muddle! Luckily the schoolmaster can speak German, and perhaps the young gentleman can too?”

“Don’t you worry about that, Mrs. Mravucsán, I’ll amuse her at supper, and look after her wants,” answered Gyuri.

With great difficulty they got ready to go, Madame Krisbay moaning and groaning as they tried to dress her, after having sent Gyuri into the passage. Mrs. Mravucsán collected all the shawls, rugs, and cloaks, and hung them over her arm.

“We will send the servant for the lady’s box,” she said.

Then she made madame lean on her, and they managed to get her downstairs. Madame was complaining, half in French, half in German, and the mayor’s wife chatted continually, sometimes to the young couple walking in front, sometimes to madame, who, with her untidy hair, looked something like a poor sick cockatoo.

“This way, this way, my dear young lady. That is our house over there. Only a few more steps, my dear madame. Oh, the dog won’t bite you. Go away, Garam! We shall be there directly. You will see what a good bed I will

St. Peter's Umbrella

give you to sleep in to-night; such pillows, the softest you can imagine!"

It made no difference to her that Madame Krisbay did not understand a word of what she was saying. Many women talk for the sake of talking. Why should they not? They are probably afraid a spider might spin its web before their mouth.

"It hurts you, does it not? But it will hurt still more to-morrow; that is always the way with a bruise of that kind. Why, you will feel it in two weeks' time."

Then, casting a sly glance at the pair walking in front:

"They make a handsome couple, don't they?"

It was not far to the Mravucsáns' house, and it would have been nearer still if there had not been an immense pool of water just in front of the Town Hall, to avoid which they had to go a good bit out of their way. But this pool was a necessity, for all the geese and ducks in the village swam on it, the pigs came and wallowed in the mud round it, and last, but not least, the firemen took their water from here in case of fire. Oh, I forgot to say that all the frogs from the whole neighborhood had taken up their abode in it, and gave splendid concerts to the villagers.

So, as I said before, they needed the pool and gladly put up with its presence, and it was con-

The Earring

sidered common property. Once a civil engineer had been sent there by the county authorities, and he had called their attention to the fact that the pool ought to be filled up; but they just laughed at him, and left it as it was.

So now they had to go right round the pool to the "hotel," which strangers always named the "Frozen Sheep," in reference to the story I mentioned before. The gypsies were still playing inside, and outside several couples were turning in time to music, and some peasants were standing about drinking their glass of "pálinka" (a kind of brandy), while a wagoner from Zólyom sat alone at a table drinking as hard as he could. He was already rather drunk, and was keeping up a lively conversation all by himself, gazing now and then with loving eyes at the lean horse harnessed to his cart, and which, with drooping head, was awaiting his master's pleasure to move on.

"My neighbor says," philosophized the wagoner aloud, "that my horse is not a horse. And why is it not a horse, pray? It was a horse in the time of Kossuth! What? It can't draw a load? Of course not, if the load is too heavy. It is thin, is it? Of course it is thin, for I don't give it any oats. Why don't I give it any? Why, because I have none, of course. What's that you say? The other day it couldn't drag my cart? No,

St. Peter's Umbrella

because the wheel was stuck in the mud. My neighbor is a great donkey, isn't he?"

Upon which, up he got, and stumbled over to the dancers, requesting them to give their opinion as to whether his neighbor was a donkey or not. They got out of his way, so, like a mad dog, which sees and hears nothing, the wagoner rushed upon Madame Krisbay.

"Is mine a horse, or is it not?"

Madame was frightened, and the smell of brandy, which emanated from the good man, made her feel faint.

"*Mon Dieu!*" she murmured, "what a country I have come to!"

But Mrs. Mravucsán, gentle as she was generally, could also be energetic if necessary.

"I don't know if yours is a horse or not," she said, "but I can tell you you're a drunken beast!"

And with that she gave him a push which sent him rolling over on his back. He lay there murmuring:

"My neighbor says my horse is blind in one eye. Nonsense! He can see the road just as well with one eye as with two."

Then up he got, and began to follow them, and Madame Krisbay, leaving go of Mrs. Mravucsán's arm, and in her fright forgetting her wounded shoulder, took to her heels and ran. The dancers

The Earring

seeing her went into fits of laughter at the pair of thin legs she showed.

“How on earth can she run so fast with such thin legs?” they asked each other.

Still more surprised were Veronica and Gyuri (who had seen nothing of the incident with the wagoner); they could not imagine why the sick woman was running at the top of her speed.

“Madame! madame! What is the matter?”

She gave no answer, only rushed to the Mravucsáns' house, where she again had a fright at the sight of three enormous watch-dogs, who received her with furious barks. She would have fallen in a faint on the floor, but at that moment Mravucsán appeared on the scene to receive his guests, so she fell into his arms instead. The good mayor just held her quietly, with astonished looks, for he had never yet seen a fainting woman, though he had heard they ought to be sprinkled with water, but how was he to go for water? Then he remembered he had heard that pinching was a good remedy, that it would, in fact, wake a dead woman; but in order to pinch a person, she must have some flesh, and Madame Krisbay had nothing but bones. So he waited with Christian patience till the others arrived on the scene, and then gave her up to their tender mercies.

“Phew!” he breathed, “what a relief!”

Intellectual Society in Babaszek

PART IV

CHAPTER I.

THE SUPPER AT THE MRAVUCSANS'.

I AM not fond of drawing things out to too great a length, so will only give a short description of the Mravucsáns' supper, which was really excellent, and if any one were discontented, it could only have been Madame Krisbay, who burned her mouth severely when eating of the first dish, which was lamb with paprika.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "something is pricking my throat!"

But the pudding she found still less to her taste (a plain paste rolled out very thin, and cut into squares, boiled and served up with curds and whey, and small squares of fried bacon).

"*Mon Dieu!*" she said, "it looks like small bits of wet linen!"

Poor Mrs. Mravucsán was inconsolable at her guest's want of appetite.

"It is such a disgrace for me," she said.

Then it occurred to her to offer her some of her preserved fruit, and to this madame seemed to

St. Peter's Umbrella

take a fancy, for she finished up the dish, and in proportion as her hunger was appeased, her liking for her surroundings increased.

She had the Lutheran clergyman, Sámuel Rafanidesz, on her right, and the schoolmaster, Teofil Klempa, on her left, and to them was deputed the task of entertaining the unfortunate foreigner. Their invitations had been put in this form:

“You *must* come, for there is to be a German lady at supper, whom you are to entertain.”

And they did all they could to prove to the rest of the company how much at ease they were in good German society.

Madame Krisbay seemed very contented with her neighbors, especially when she discovered that the Rev. Sámuel Rafanidesz was a bachelor. What! did clergymen marry there? (Perhaps, after all, she had not come to such a bad country!)

The schoolmaster was a much handsomer man, but he was older, and was, besides, married. He had an intelligent face, and a long, flowing black beard; he had, too, a certain amount of wit, which he dealt out in small portions. Madame Krisbay smiled at his sallies. Poor woman! She would have liked to have laughed at them, but did not dare to, for her throat was still burning from the effects of that horrid paprika. Now and then her face (which was otherwise like yellow wax)

The Supper at the Mravucsans'

got quite red from the efforts she made to keep from coughing, which, besides being the forerunner of old age, she also considered very demeaning.

"Don't mind us, my dear," called out the mayor's wife, "cough away as much as you like. A cough and poverty cannot be hidden."

Madame began to feel more and more at home, for, as it turned out, the clergyman had been at school at Munich, and could tell a lot of anecdotes of his life there, in the Munich dialect, much to madame's delight. The Rev. Sámuel Rafanidesz did not belong to the stiff, unpleasant order of clergymen, and there was a Slovak sentence composed by Teofil Klempa, often repeated by the good people of Bábaszék, which bore reference to him, and which, if read backward, gave his name: "Szedi ná fare, Rafanidesz" ("Stay in your parish, Rafanidesz"). But he never took this advice, and had already been sent away from one living (somewhere in Nográd) because of an entanglement with some lady in the parish. Mrs. Mravucsán knew the whole story, and even the lady, a certain Mrs. Bahó. She must have been a silly woman, for it was she herself who let the cat out of the bag, to her own husband too; and she was not a beauty either, as we can see from Mrs. Mravucsán's words:

"Rafanidesz was a fool. You should never

St. Peter's Umbrella

ask a kiss from an ugly woman, nor a loan from a poor man, for they immediately go and boast of it."

Thus Mrs. Mravucsán. It is true she added:

"But if any one were to call me as a witness, I should deny the whole thing."

So you see, I can't stand good for the truth of it either. But that is neither here nor there.

Madame Krisbay certainly enjoyed the company of her two neighbors, and those gentlemen soon raised the whole country in her estimation. But it was lucky she understood no Slovak, and could not hear the conversation carried on by the intelligence of Bábaszék. Of course they were clever people too, in their way, and Veronica often smiled at the jokes made, for they were all new to her, though the natives of Bábaszék knew them all by heart; for instance, the rich butcher, Pál Kukucska, always got up when the third course was on the table, and drank to his own health, saying:

"Long life to my wife's husband!"

It would really be waste of time to try and describe the supper, for nothing of any real importance happened. They ate, they drank, and then they went home. Perhaps they spoke of important matters? Not they! Only a thousand trifles were discussed, which it would be a pity to put in print; and yet the incidents of that supper were

The Supper at the Mravucsans'

the talk of Bábaszék for weeks after. For instance, Mr. Mravucsán upset a glass of wine with the sleeve of his coat, and while they were wiping it up, and strewing salt on the stain, Senator Konopka, turning to the lady of the house, exclaimed:

“That means a christening, madam!”

Of course Mrs. Mravucsán blushed, but Veronica asked in a most innocent tone:

“How can you know that?” (She was either a goose, that young girl, or she was a good actress.)

Now who was to answer her with a face as innocent as the Blessed Virgin's must have been when she was a girl in short frocks? They all looked at each other, but luckily the forester's wife, Mrs. Wladimir Szliminszky, came to the rescue with this explanation:

“You see, my dear, the stork which brings the children generally lets one know beforehand, and the knocking over a glass is one of the signs it gives.”

Veronica thought for a bit, and then shook her head unbelievably.

“But I saw the gentleman knock the glass over himself,” she objected.

To this Mrs. Szliminszky had no answer ready, so, according to her usual custom, she turned to her husband and began worrying him.

St. Peter's Umbrella

"Wladin, cut the fat off that meat."

Wladin frowned.

"But, my dear, that is just the best bit."

"Never mind, Wladin, I can't allow it. Your health is the first consideration."

And Wladin obediently cut off the fat bits.

"Why is your coat unbuttoned? Don't you feel how cold it is? Button it up at once, Wladin."

The forester did as he was told, and with the pleasant feeling of having done his duty, turned his attention to his plate again.

"Not another bit, Wladin, you've had enough. We don't want you to dream of bulls to-night."

Wladin obediently put down his knife and fork, and prepared to drink a glass of water.

"Give it me first," cried his wife excitedly. "I want to see that it is not too cold."

Wladin handed over his glass of water.

"You may drink a little of it, but not too much. Stop, stop, that will do!"

Poor Wladin! He was a martyr to conjugal love! For sixteen years he had suffered under this constant thoughtfulness, and though he was a strong man when he married, and had never been ill since, yet every minute of his life he expected some catastrophe; for, through constant warnings, the unfortunate Pole had worked himself up to the belief that a current of air or a drop

The Supper at the Mravucsans'

of water could be disastrous to him. He felt that Nature had bad intentions toward him.

"Take care, Wladin, or the dog will bite your foot!"

One of the watch-dogs was under the table gnawing at a bone he had possessed himself of, and a little farther off the cat was looking on, longingly, as much as to say: "Give me some of that superfluous food."

Now began the so-called "amabilis confusio." Every one spoke at once, and every one about a different subject. The Senators had returned to the important question of the corpse hanging in the wood; Mrs. Mravucsán complained that no one was eating anything, and looked as wretched as she could.

Each one drank to the other's health, and during the quiet moment that followed, a voice was heard:

"Oh, Wladin, Wladin!"

It was Mrs. Szliminszky's voice; she evidently objected to her husband drinking, and her neighbor, Mr. Mokry, the lawyer's clerk, objected to her constant distractions, in spite of the interesting theme they were discussing.

"That strong cigar will harm you, Wladin; you had better put it down. Well, and why did you go to Besztercebánya, Mr. Mokry?"

St. Peter's Umbrella

"I had a lot to do there, but, above all, I bought the suit I have on."

He looked admiringly at his dark blue suit for about the hundredth time that evening.

"It is a very nice suit. What did you pay for it?"

"I had it made to measure at Klener's, and went to try it on myself."

"What was the price?"

"It is real Gács cloth, and quite impervious to rain; you should see it by daylight!"

"Yes, of course, but what did it cost?" asked the Polish lady, her thoughts still occupied with her husband.

"I saw the piece of cloth myself; this was the first length cut off it. It has a peculiar look in the sunlight."

"Yes, yes; but I asked the price of it."

But it was difficult to bring Mokry to think of other things when he was once launched on the subject of his new suit.

"Klener has a tailor working for him, a certain Kupek, who used to work at one of the court tailors' in Vienna, and he said to me: 'Don't grudge the money, Mr. Mokry, for this is such a durable stuff that your own skin will wear out first.' Please feel it."

"It's as soft as silk. Wladin, my dear, I think you had better change places with me. You are

The Supper at the Mravucsans'

in a draught there each time the door is opened. What are you making such a face for? You surely don't mean to argue with me? Over you come now!"

The beloved martyr changed places with his wife, and now Mrs. Szliminszky was on the opposite side of the table, next to Wibra; but he was entirely taken up with Veronica, who was chattering to her heart's content. The clever young man, of whom it was said he would once be the first lawyer in Besztercebánya, was listening to the girl with as much attention as though a bishop were speaking, and would not for a moment have taken his eyes off her.

They spoke quietly, as though they were discussing very important questions, though they were in reality speaking of the most innocent things. What did Veronica do at home? She read a good deal, and took long walks. What did she read, and where did she walk? And Veronica gave the titles of some books. Gyuri had read them all too, and they began exchanging notes regarding some of them, such as "Elemér the Eagle," "Iván Berend," "Aranka Béldi." Gyuri considered Pál Béldi very stupid for not accepting the title of prince when it was offered him. Veronica thought it was better he had not done so, for if he had, the novel would never have been written.

St. Peter's Umbrella

Then Gyuri began to question her about Glogova. Was it very dull? Veronica looked at him, surprised. How could Glogova be dull? It was as though some ignorant person had asked if Paris were dull.

"Is there a wood there?"

"A beautiful one."

"Do you ever go there?"

"Of course."

"Are you not afraid?"

"Afraid of what?"

"Well, you know, woods sometimes have inhabitants one might be afraid of."

"Oh, but the inhabitants of our woods are more afraid of me than I of them."

"Can any one be afraid of you?"

"Oh, yes they are, because I catch them."

"The robbers?"

"Don't be so silly, or I shall be cross!"

"I should like to see what you look like when you are cross."

"Well, I shall be if you talk such rubbish again. I catch butterflies in the wood."

"Are there pretty butterflies there? I had a collection when I was a student; I believe I have it still."

At this a desire for rivalry seized hold of Veronica.

"You should see my collection," she said. "I

The Supper at the Mravucsans'

have all kinds. Tigers, Admirals, Apollos; only, it is such a pity, my Apollo has lost one of its wings."

"Have you a Hebe?"

"Oh, yes, it is nearly as big as the palm of my hand."

"And how big is that? Let me see it."

Veronica spread out her hand on the table; it was not so very big after all, but fine and pink as a roseleaf. Gyuri took a match and began to measure it, and in doing so, accidentally touched her hand with his finger, upon which she hastily drew it away and blushed furiously.

"It is very hot," she said, putting up her hand to her hot face, as though she had drawn it away for that purpose.

"Yes, the room has got quite hot," broke in Mrs. Szliminszky. "Unbutton your coat, Wladin!"

Wladin heaved a sigh of relief, and undid his coat.

Veronica returned to the subject of the butterflies.

"I think butterfly catching must be the same to me as hunting is to a man."

"I am very fond of butterflies," answered Gyuri, "because they only love once."

"Oh, I have another reason for liking them."

"Perhaps because of their mustaches?"

St. Peter's Umbrella

Veronica turned her head away impatiently.

"Mr. Wibra, you are beginning to be unpleasant."

"Thank you for the compliment."

"What compliment?"

"You say I am beginning to be unpleasant, which is as much as to say I was pleasant till now."

"I see it is dangerous to talk with you, for you put words into my mouth I never intended saying. I shall not speak again."

"I'll never do it again, never, I assure you. Only do talk," pleaded Gyuri.

"Do the butterflies really interest you?"

"Upon my honor, they interest me more at this moment than lions and tigers."

"I think butterflies are so pretty—like a beautifully dressed woman. And what tasteful combinations of color! I always look at their wings as though they were so many patterns of materials. For instance, look at a Hebe, with its black and red under-wings, do not they match beautifully with the yellow and blue-top wings! And then the Tiger, with its brown and yellow-spotted dress! Believe me, the renowned Worth might with advantage take a walk in the woods, and learn the art of combining shades from the butterflies."

"Gently, Wladin!" called out Mrs. Szlimins-

The Supper at the Mravucsans'

zky at this moment. "How many lungs have you? A three-kreutzer stamp is sufficient for local letters."

Wladin and Senator Fajka were wondering how matters would stand if they were both very deaf, and Wladin was talking so loudly that his loving spouse felt bound to put in a word of remonstrance, and request him to have some respect for his lungs.

"They are quite close to each other, and yet they shout as though they were trying to persuade some one not to put a fifteen-kreutzer stamp on a local letter. Oh dear! When will people be more sensible?"

At that moment, Senator Konopka rose and drank to the health of the host, the "regenerator" of Bábaszék. He spoke in exactly the same thin, piping voice as Mr. Mravucsán; when the guests closed their eyes, they really believed the master of the house himself was speaking, and sounding his own praises; of course this caused great amusement. Upon that up sprang the mayor, and answered the toast in Konopka's voice, with just the same grimaces and movements he always made, and the merriment rose in proportion. Kings do this too in another form, for at meetings and banquets they pay each other the compliment of dressing up in each other's uniforms; and yet no one thinks of laughing at them.

St. Peter's Umbrella

Toast succeeded toast.

"You have let the dogs loose now," whispered Fajka to Konopka.

Mokry drank to the health of the lady of the house, and then Mravucsán stood up a second time to return thanks in his wife's name. He remarked that, to their great disappointment, one of those invited had been unable to come, namely, Mrs. Müncz, who had at the last moment had an attack of gout in her foot, which was no wonder, considering the amount of standing and running about she did when there was a fair in their town. Then they all emptied their glasses to the health of the old Jewess.

After the shouts of acclamation had died away, Wladin Szliminszky called out:

"Now it is my turn!"

"Wladin, don't make a speech!" cried his wife. "You know it is bad for your lungs to speak so loud."

But she could do nothing now to prevent him; a henpecked husband is capable of everything; he will button or unbutton his coat, eat or drink to order, but refrain from making the speech his brain has conceived he will not; at least, it has never yet been heard of in the annals of Hungarian history.

"I take up my glass, gentlemen, to drink to the fairest flower of the company, beloved by God,

The Supper at the Mravucsans'

Who on one occasion sent down His servant from Heaven, saying: 'Go down at once, Peter, with an umbrella; don't let the child get wet.' Long life to Miss Veronica Bélyi!"

Veronica was as red as a rose, especially when the guests all got up one after the other, and went and kissed her hand; some of them even knelt to do it, and pious Mrs. Mravucsán bent down and kissed the hem of her dress.

Gyuri thought at first on hearing Wladin's peculiar speech that the good man had gone mad, and now seeing every one following his example, was more surprised than ever, and a strange feeling crept over him.

"What miracle is it your husband is referring to?" he asked, turning to Mrs. Szliminszky.

That good lady looked at him surprised.

"What! Don't you know the story? Why, it is impossible. It is even printed in Slovak verse."

"What is printed?"

"Why, the story of the umbrella . . . Wladin, you are very hot, your face is the color of a boiled lobster. Shall I give you my fan?"

"What about the umbrella?" queried Gyuri impatiently.

"It is really strange you have never heard anything about it. Well, the story runs, that when your fair neighbor was a little child, they once

St. Peter's Umbrella

left her out on the veranda of the priest's house. Her brother, the priest of Glogova, was in the church praying. A storm came on, it poured in torrents, and the child would have been wet through and have got inflammation of the lungs, or something of the kind, if a miracle had not taken place. An old man appeared on the scene, no one knows from where; he seemed to have fallen from heaven, and he spread an umbrella over the child's head."

"My umbrella!" burst unconsciously from the lawyer.

"What did you say?"

"Nothing, nothing."

His blood coursed more quickly through his veins, his heart beat faster, he raised his head quickly, with the result that he also knocked his glass over.

"A christening, another christening!" called out every one.

"My best wishes," said Mr. Rafanidesz, turning to Mrs. Szliminszky, who blushed becomingly and told him not to talk nonsense.

But the young lawyer would not let her continue the conversation; he drew his chair nearer to hers, and said:

"Please go on."

"Well, the gray-haired man disappeared, no

The Supper at the Mravucsans'

one knew how nor where, and those who saw him for a moment swore it was St. Peter."

"It was Müncz!"

"Did you speak?"

Gyuri bit his lip, and saw that he had spoken his thoughts aloud.

"Nothing, nothing; please go on."

"Well, St. Peter disappeared, and left the umbrella behind him."

"And does it still exist?"

"I should think it does indeed. They keep it as a relic in the church of Glogova."

"Thank God!"

He drew a deep breath, as though a great weight had fallen from him.

"Found!" he murmured. He thought he would have fallen from his chair in his joy.

"And to whom does it belong? To the Church?" asked Gyuri.

"It may be yours once," said Mrs. Szliminszky. "It will be Veronica's when she marries; the priest of Glogova told me so himself. 'It will belong to my sister,' he said, 'unless she makes a present of it to the Church when she marries.'"

"Oh, no," said the lawyer, shaking his head. "At least, I mean . . . What am I saying? What were we speaking about? It is fearfully

St. Peter's Umbrella

warm, I'm stifling. Please, Mr. Mravucsán, could we have the window open?"

"Of course," and the mayor ran to open it.

"Button up your coat, Wladin!"

A fresh spring air entered by the window, and a slight breeze put out both the candles.

"Kisses allowed," called out Klempa.

A branch of lilac was just outside the window, and spread its delicious perfume through the room, decidedly more pleasant than the fumes of tobacco smoke which had filled it a minute before.

Madame Krisbay, startled by the sudden darkness, gave vent to a little scream, and Klempa seized the opportunity to exclaim:

"I assure you it was not I!"

There was a general confusion in the darkness, but Mrs. Szliminszky, wanting to prove she was above being troubled by such trifles, quietly continued her conversation with Gyuri.

"It is a pretty little legend, Mr. Wibra. I am not easily imposed upon, and, besides, we are Lutherans; but I must say it is a very pretty legend. But the umbrella is really wonderful. Sick people are cured if they stand under it; a dead man rose to life again when it touched him. It is of no use your shaking your head, for it is true. I know the man himself, he is still alive. Altogether the things that umbrella has done are

The Supper at the Mravucsans'

wonderful, especially the fact that it has brought luck and riches to the priest of Glogova."

A dark suspicion took possession of Gyuri, and when the candles were relighted, it was to be seen he was as pale as death.

"Is the priest rich?" he asked.

"Very rich," answered Mrs. Szliminszky.

He drew nearer to her, and suddenly seized hold of her hand, pressing it convulsively. The good lady could not make out why. (If he had done so a minute sooner, she could have understood it, but the candles were alight now!)

"He found something in the umbrella, did he not?" he asked, panting.

Mrs. Szliminszky shrugged her white shoulders, half visible through the lace insertion of her dress.

"Why, what could he find in an umbrella? It is not a box, nor an iron case. But for the last fourteen years people have come from great distances to be married under the umbrella, and they pay generously for it. And then when a rich person is dying anywhere beyond the Bjela Voda, from the Szitnya right as far as Kriván, they send for the priest of Glogova to hear their confession, and after their death, to bury them under the umbrella."

Veronica, to whom the mayor's wife had been showing the embroidered table-cloth, calling her

St. Peter's Umbrella

attention to the fineness of the linen, now caught a few words of the conversation.

"Are you speaking of our umbrella?" she asked amiably, leaning toward them.

Gyuri and Mrs. Szliminszky started.

"Yes, my dear," answered the latter, slightly confused.

Gyuri smiled mischievously.

"I see," said Veronica, "you don't believe the story."

"No, I do not."

"Really?" asked the girl reproachfully; "and why?"

"Because I never believe nonsense, and because . . ."

He had nearly said too much, but he kept back the words that rose to his lips when he saw how wounded the girl appeared at his incredulity. She smiled, turned her head away, and gazed silently at her plate. Gyuri was silent too, though he felt inclined to cry out:

"I am rich at last, for in the handle of that umbrella there are unknown treasures."

It is remarkable that if good luck befalls a man, his first wish (for he still has wishes, even if they are all fulfilled) is to communicate it to others; he would like trumpets sounded, heralds to be sent round to announce it to the whole world.

The Supper at the Mravucsans'

But then comes doubt, the everlasting "perhaps." And so it was with Gyuri.

"What is the umbrella like, Miss Veronica?" he asked.

Veronica closed her lips firmly, as though she considered it unnecessary to answer him, then thought better of it, and said:

"It is not much to look at; it is of faded red stuff, looks a thousand years old, and is patched all over."

"With a border of small green flowers?"

"Have you seen it?"

"No, I only asked."

"Yes, there is a border of green flowers on it."

"Could I see it?"

"Certainly. Do you wish to?"

"That is what I am going to Glogova for."

"Why, if you don't believe in it?"

"Just for that very reason. If I believed in it I should not go."

"You are a heathen."

She drew her chair away from him, at which he at once became serious.

"Have I hurt you?" he asked contritely.

"No, but you frighten me," and her lovely oval face expressed disappointment.

"I will believe anything you like, only don't be afraid of me."

St. Peter's Umbrella

Veronica smiled slightly.

"It would be a shame not to believe it," struck in Mrs. Szliminszky, "for it is a fact—there is plenty to prove it. If you don't believe that, you don't believe anything. Either the miracles in the Bible are true, and if so, this is true too, or . . ."

But she could not finish her sentence, for at that moment Madame Krisbay rose from the table, saying she was tired, and would like to retire to her room, and Mrs. Mravucsán led her and Veronica to two small rooms opening on to the courtyard. In the doorway Gyuri bowed to Veronica, who returned it with a slight nod.

"Shall we start early in the morning?" he asked.

She bowed with mock humility.

"As you like, Mr. Thomas," she said.

Gyuri understood the reference, and answered in the same strain:

"It depends upon how long the saints sleep."

Veronica turned her head, and shook her fist playfully at him.

"I will pay you out!" she said.

Gyuri could hardly take his eyes off her, she looked so pretty as she spoke. Let the saints look like that if they could!

Soon after the Szliminszky pair started for home, accompanied by a man carrying a lantern.

The Supper at the Mravucsans'

Mrs. Szliminszky had made Wladin put on a light spring coat, hung a long cloak over his shoulders, tied a big woollen scarf round his neck, and having ordered him only to breathe through his nose, once they were out, she turned to Gyuri again.

"Yes, it is a beautiful legend, it made a great impression on me."

"Poor legends!" returned Gyuri. "If we were to pick some of them to pieces, and take the romance out of them, their saintly odor, their mystery, what strange and simple truths would be left!"

"Well, they must not be picked to pieces, that is all. Wladin, turn up the collar of your coat."

The lawyer thought for a minute.

"Perhaps you are right," he said.

After a short time Gyuri also asked to be shown to his room.

"The magnet has gone!" muttered the lawyer's clerk.

Hardly had the door closed when Kukucska, the butcher, exclaimed:

"Now we are free!"

He took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves, thus showing the head of an ox tattooed on his left arm, then winked knowingly at Mravucsán. The mayor seemed to understand the look, for he went to a cupboard and pulled out one of the drawers, from which he took a pack of cards. The knave

St. Peter's Umbrella

of spades was missing, but that did not make any difference to the intelligent members of Bábaszék society, for they had once before played "Preference" with those cards, and the last player had simply received one card less when they were dealt out, though he was supposed to have the knave of spades, and it was called the "spirit card." If they were playing spades, the last player in imagination threw the knave on it, saying: "I play the spirit card!" So now, in spite of this small difficulty, they decided to play, and the game lasted till daylight. The Senators, the butcher, and the clergyman played, the lawyer's clerk dealt, and Klempa looked on, having no money to lose, and went from one player to the other, looking over their shoulders, and giving them advice what to play. But one after the other sent him away, declaring he brought them bad luck, which rather depressed him. So the poor schoolmaster wandered from one to the other, till at last he took a seat between the clergyman and the butcher, dropped his weary head on the table, and went to sleep, his long beard doubled up, and serving as a pillow. But he was to have a sad awakening, for that mischievous Pál Kukukska, seeing the beard on the table, conceived the idea of sealing it there; and fetching a candle and sealing-wax, they dropped some on the beard in three places, and Mravucsán pressed

The Supper at the Mravucsans'

his own signet ring on it. Then they went on playing, until he should awake.

Other incidents, and not very pleasant ones either, were taking place in the house. Madame Krisbay, to whom the mayor's wife had given her own bedroom, would not go to bed with the enormous eider-down quilt over her, for she was afraid of being suffocated during the night. She asked for a "paplan" (a kind of wadded bed cover), but Mrs. Mravucsán did not possess such a thing, so she brought in her husband's enormous fur-lined cloak and threw it over madame, which so frightened the poor nervous woman that she was attacked by migraine, and the mayor's wife had to spend the night by her bed, putting horse-radish on her temples.

An unpleasant thing happened to Veronica too. As soon as she was alone in the Mravucsáns' best bedroom, she locked the door, hung a cloak on the door-handle so that no one could look through the key-hole, drew the curtains across the tiny windows which opened on to the courtyard, and then began to undress. She had taken off the bodice of her dress and unfastened her skirt, when all at once she became aware of two bright eyes watching her intently from under the bed. It was a kitten, and it was gazing at her as intently and admiringly as though it had been a prince changed by some old witch into the form of a cat.

St. Peter's Umbrella

Veronica, alarmed, caught up her skirt and bodice, and put them on again.

"Go along, you tiresome kitten," she said; "don't look at me when I'm undressing."

She was such an innocent child, she was ashamed to undress before the kitten. She dressed again, and tried to drive it out of the room, but it hid itself under the bed, then jumped on a cupboard, and it was quite impossible to get rid of it. Mrs. Mravucsán, hearing the noise from the next room, called out:

"What is the matter, my dear?"

"I can't drive the cat out."

"Never mind, she won't hurt you."

"But she always watches me," answered Veronica.

She put her candle out, and began to undress in the dark, but that tiresome cat walked into the middle of the room again, and her eyes shone more than ever.

"Wait a bit, you curious little thing," said Veronica. "I'll get the best of you yet."

She made a barricade of chairs, then got inside it, as though she were in a fortress, and began to undo her boots. Do you think that barricade made any impression on the kitten? Not a bit of it. There she was again, on the top of the chairs, from there one jump took her on to the washing-stand, and another on to Veronica's bed. There

The Supper at the Mravucsans'

she was seized upon and a shawl bound round her head.

“Now, kitty, stare at me if you can!”

And after that she managed to undress in peace.

CHAPTER II.

NIGHT BRINGS COUNSEL.

WHILE the two ladies were occupied with these trifles, and Klempa with his beard sealed to the table slept the sleep of the just, Gyuri had also retired to his bed, but found it impossible to sleep. It was not from indigestion, for Mrs. Mravuc-sán's excellent supper had not disagreed with him; it was his brain which was hard at work, going over all the incidents that had taken place that day. He seemed to have lived through years in the last few hours. What an age it seemed since he had looked for the umbrella in Mrs. Müncz's shop! And it was found quite unexpectedly. God had given it into the charge of an angel.

From the umbrella his thoughts flew to the "angel."

She was a nice little thing, he decided; not a bit unpleasant like other girls of that age he knew, who were thoughtless, useless creatures. Ve-

Night Brings Counsel

ronica was an exception. And she seemed to have taken to him too.

He passed again in revision all her words, her movements, and as he went on, he found among the smiles, the softened voice, the unwatched moments, certain signs of coldness here and there, as though she were putting a restraint upon herself.

But he was so happy now, that he did not need the friendship of a silly girl. He was a rich man now, a nabob beginning from to-day. He would live like a prince henceforward, spend the winter in Budapest, or on the Riviera, in Monaco, and the summer at Ostend; in fact, he would be a grand gentleman, and not even look at poor priests' sisters. (How tiresome it was, his thoughts would always return to Veronica.)

Sleep would not come, how could it be expected? One scheme after the other passed before his mind's eye, like the butterflies in the Glo-gova woods. And he chased them all in turn. Oh! if it were only daylight, and he could move on. His watch was ticking on the table beside his bed; he looked at it, the hands pointed to midnight. Impossible! It must be later than that; his watch must be slow! Somewhere in the distance a cock crew, as much as to say: "Your watch is quite right, Mr. Wibra." He heard faint sounds of music proceeding from the "Frozen Sheep" in the distance, and some one on

St. Peter's Umbrella

his way home was singing a Slovak shepherd's song.

Gyuri lighted a cigar, and sat down to smoke it and think things over. How strangely the umbrella had been found—at least *he* had not found it yet, it was not yet in his possession, and when he came to look at the facts, he found he was not much nearer to it than he had been. Until now he had supposed it had been thrown away as a useless rag, and he had had little hope of finding it. And now, what had happened? Things were quite different to what they had imagined them; for as it turned out, the umbrella was a treasure, a relic in a church. What was to be done about it? What was he to say to the priest to-morrow? “I have come for my umbrella”? The priest would only laugh at him, for, either he was bigoted and superstitious, in which case he would believe St. Peter had brought the umbrella to his sister, or he was a Pharisee, and in that case he would not be such a fool as to betray himself.

The wind was rising, and the badly fitting windows and door of the little room that had been allotted to him were rattling, and the furniture cracked now and then. He could even hear the wind whistling through the Liskovina Wood, not far from the house. Gyuri blew out the light and lay down again under the big eider-down quilt,

Night Brings Counsel

and imagined he saw the corpse Mr. Mravucsán had spoken of, hanging from a tree, waving from side to side in the wind, and nodding its head at him, saying: "Oh, yes, Mr. Wibra, you'll be well laughed at in the parish of Glogova."

The lawyer tossed about on the snow-white pillows, from which an odor of spring emanated (they had been out in the garden to air the day before).

"Never mind," thought he, "the umbrella is mine after all. I can prove it in a court of justice if necessary. I have witnesses. There are Mr. Sztolarik, Mrs. Müncz and her sons, the whole town of Besztercebánya."

Then he laughed bitterly.

"And yet, what am I thinking of? I can't prove it, for, after all, the umbrella does not belong to me, but to the Müncz family, for the old man bought it. So only that which is in the handle belongs to me. But can I go to the priest and say: 'Your reverence, in the handle of the umbrella is a check for 200,000 or 300,000 florins, please give it to me, for it belongs of right to me'?"

Then Gyuri began to wonder what the priest would answer. He either believed the legend of the umbrella, and would then say: "Go along, do! St. Peter is not such a fool as to bring you a check on a bank from Heaven!" Or if he did

St. Peter's Umbrella

look in the handle and find the receipt, he would say: "Well, if he did bring it, he evidently meant it for me." And he would take it out and keep it. Why should he give it to Gyuri? How was he to prove it belonged to him?

"Supposing," thought our hero, "I were to tell him the whole story, about my mother, about my father, and all the circumstances attending his death. Let us imagine he would believe it from Alpha to Omega; of what use would it be? Does it prove that the treasure is mine? Certainly not. And even if it did, would he give it to me? A priest is only a man after all. Could I have a lawsuit, if he would not give it me? What nonsense! Of course not. He might take the receipt out of the handle, and what proofs can I bring then that it was ever in it?"

The perspiration stood on his forehead; he bit the bed-clothes in his helpless rage. To be so near to his inheritance, and yet not be able to seize hold of it!"

"Black night, give counsel!" was Gyuri's prayer. And it is best, after all, to turn to the night for help. Gyuri was right to ask its advice, for it is a good friend to thought. Among the Golden Rules should be written: "Think over all your actions by night, even if you have decided by day what course to take!" For a man has night thoughts and day thoughts, though I do not know

Night Brings Counsel

which are the better. I rather think neither kind is perfect. For daylight, like a weaver, works its colors into one's thoughts, and night covers them with its black wings. Both of them paint, increase and decrease things—in one word, falsify them. Night shows the beloved one more beautiful than he is, it strengthens one's enemies, increases one's troubles, diminishes one's joy. It is not kind of it; but night is sovereign, and is answerable to no one for its actions. Take things as they come, but do not put aside serious thought when you are seeking the truth. Though, of course, you do not really seek the truth; even if it comes to meet you, you get out of its way. I ought to have said, do not despise the night when you are trying to find the way out of a thing. Night will show you what to do, without your even noticing it. If it can do it in no other way, it brings you gentle sleep, and gives you advice in dreams.

After a time the wind dropped, the music at the "Frozen Sheep" ceased, and Gyuri heard nothing but a rhythmic murmur, and all at once he seemed to be in the woods of Glogova, chasing butterflies with Veronica.

As they ran on among the bushes, an old man suddenly appeared before them, with a golden crook, a glory round his head, and his hat hanging by a bit of string from his neck.

St. Peter's Umbrella

"Are you Mr. Wibra?" he inquired.

"Yes; and you?"

"I am St. Peter."

"What do you want?"

"I wish to sign a receipt for your happiness."

"For my happiness?"

"I see you cannot get your umbrella, and my friend Gregorics has asked me to help you. So I am quite willing to sign a paper declaring that I did not give the umbrella to the young lady."

"It is very good of you, but I have neither paper nor ink here. Let us go back to the village."

"I have no time for that; you know I have to be at the gates of Heaven, and I can't stay away for long."

"Well, what am I to do, how am I to get my umbrella?"

St. Peter turned his back, and began to walk back the way he had come, but stood still beside a large oak-tree, and made a sign to Gyuri to approach. Gyuri obeyed.

"I'll tell you what, my friend, don't think too long about it, but marry Veronica, and then you will have the umbrella too."

"Come," said Gyuri, catching hold of the golden crook. "Come and ask her brother to give his permission."

He pulled hard at the crook, but at that moment

Night Brings Counsel

a strong hand seemed to pull him back, and he awoke.

Some one was knocking at the door.

“Come in,” he said sleepily.

It was the Mravucsáns’ farm-servant.

“I’ve come for your boots,” he announced.

Gyuri rubbed his eyes. It was day at last, the sun was smiling at him through the window. His thoughts were occupied with his dream, every incident of which was fresh in his mind. He thought he heard St. Peter’s voice again saying: “Marry Veronica, my friend, and then you will have the umbrella too.”

“What a strange dream,” thought Gyuri; “and how very much logic it contains! Why, I might have thought of that solution myself!”

* * * * *

By the time Gyuri was dressed, it was getting late, and every member of the Mravucsán household was on foot. One was carrying a pail to the stables, another a sieve, and near the gate which last night’s wind had partly lifted off its hinges, Gyuri’s coachman was examining the damage done. Seeing his master advancing toward him, he took off his hat with its ostrich feathers (part of the livery of a Hungarian coachman is a kind of round hat, with two ends of black ribbon hanging from it at the back, and some small ostrich tips in it).

St. Peter's Umbrella

"Shall I harness the horses, sir?"

"I don't know yet. Here, my good girl, are the ladies up?"

"They are breakfasting in the garden," answered the maid he had accosted. "Please walk this way."

"Well, then, you may harness, János."

Gyuri found the ladies seated round a stone table under a large walnut-tree. They had finished breakfast, only madame was still nibbling a bit of toast. He was received with ironical smiles, and Veronica called out:

"Here comes the early riser!"

"That title belongs to me," said Mravucsán, "for I have not been to bed at all. We played cards till daybreak. Klempa is still asleep with his beard sealed to the table."

"A nice sort of thing for grown-up folks to do!" remarked Mrs. Mravucsán.

Gyuri shook hands with them all, and Veronica got up and made a deep courtesy.

"Good-morning, early riser," she said. "Why are you staring at me so?"

"I don't know how it is," stammered Gyuri, gazing at the girl's beautiful face, "but you seem to me to have grown."

"In one night?"

"You were quite a little girl yesterday."

"You appear to be dazed!"

Night Brings Counsel

"I certainly am when I look at you."

"You seem to be sleepy still. Is this the time of day to get up?"

The playful, gentle tone was delightful to Gyuri, and he began to be quite talkative.

"I fell asleep for a short time, and if the servant had not woke me, I should be asleep still. Oh, if he had only waited five minutes longer!"

"Had you such a pleasant dream?" asked Mrs. Mravucsán. "Will you take some coffee?"

"If you please."

"Won't you tell us your dream?"

"I was going to marry—in fact, had got as far as the proposal."

"Did she refuse you?" asked Veronica, raising her head, the beauty of which was enhanced by the rich coronet of hair, in which she had stuck a lovely pink.

"I don't know what would have happened, for at the critical moment the servant woke me."

"What a pity, we shall never know how it would have turned out!"

"You shall know some time."

"How?"

"I will tell you."

"How can you do that? Dreams cannot be continued from one night to another like novels in a periodical."

Gyuri drank his coffee, lit a cigar, and from out

St. Peter's Umbrella

the cloud of smoke he replied in a mysterious voice, his eyes turned heavenward:

“There are such dreams, as you will see. And how did you sleep?”

Thereupon Mrs. Mravucsán began to tell the story of Veronica's adventure with the kitten. Every one laughed, poor Veronica was covered with blushes, and Mrs. Mravucsán, finding the opportunity a good one, launched upon a little lecture.

“My dear child, exaggeration is never good, not even in modesty. You will have to get used to such things. What will you do when you are married? You will not be able to shut your husband out of your room.”

“Oh, dear!” exclaimed Veronica. “How can you say such dreadful things!”

And she jumped up, blushing furiously, and ran away to the gooseberry-bushes, where her dress got caught, and in trying to move on, the gathers got torn. Thereupon there was a rush for needle and thread, and the confusion was heightened when the carriage drove up, the two handsome black horses pawing the ground impatiently.

(The lawyer's business must be a good one; he must have lied a lot to be able to buy such horses!)

Every member of the household had some task

Night Brings Counsel

allotted to her. Anka must wrap up the ham in a cloth, Zsuzsa must run and fetch the fresh bread that had been baked for the occasion. Some one else must bring knives and forks. Would they like a little fruit packed in the basket? The foreign lady would be glad of something of the kind. And should she put a small pot of jam in too?"

"But, my dear Mrs. Mravucsán, we shall be at home by dinner-time!"

"And supposing something happens to prevent it? You never can know."

And off she went to her storeroom, while the mayor tried to persuade them to stay at least an hour longer; but it was of no use, the travellers had made up their minds to start; not even the possibility of seeing Klempa wake up would induce them to change their plans.

They got into the carriage, the two ladies on the back seat, and Gyuri on the box with the coachman, but his face turned toward the ladies. Whether he would hold out in that uncomfortable position till Glogova remained to be seen.

"To Glogova," said Gyuri to the coachman, and János cracked his whip and the horses started, but hardly were they out of the yard, when the mayor's wife came tripping after them, calling out to them at the top of her voice to stop. They did so, wondering what had happened. But nothing serious was the matter, only Mrs. Mravucsán

St. Peter's Umbrella

had unearthed a few apples in her storeroom, with which she filled their pockets, impressing upon them that the beautiful rosy-cheeked one was for Veronica. Then they started again, with a great amount of waving of handkerchiefs and hats, until the house, with its smoking chimneys and its large walnut-tree, was out of sight.

As they passed Mrs. Müncz's shop she was standing at the door in her white cap, nodding to them with her gray head, which seemed cut into two parts by the broad-rimmed spectacles. At the smithy they were hammering away at the priest's broken chaise, and farther on various objects which had been left unsold at yesterday's fair were being packed in boxes, and then put in carts to be taken home again. They passed in turn all the tiny houses, with their brightly-painted doors, on which the names of the owners were printed in circles. At the last house, opposite the future Jewish burial-ground, two pistol-shots were fired.

The travellers turned their heads that way, and saw Mr. Mokry in his new suit, made by the noted tailor of Besztercebánya, with his hat in one hand, and in the other the pistol he had fired as a farewell greeting. On the other side of the road was the dangerous windmill, its enormous sails throwing shadows over the flowering clover-fields. Luckily it was not moving now, and

Night Brings Counsel

looked like an enormous fly pinned on the blue sky.

There was not a breath of wind, and the ears of wheat stood straight and stiff, like an army of soldiers. Only the sound of the horses' hoofs was to be heard, and the woods of Liskovina stretched before them like a never-ending green wall.

The Third Devil

PART V

CHAPTER I.

MARIA CZOBOR'S ROSE, THE PRECIPICE, AND THE OLD PEAR-TREE.

MADAME KRISBAY was very much interested in the neighborhood they were driving through, and asked many questions. They passed a small chapel in the wood, and Veronica explained that a rich innkeeper had once been killed there by robbers, and the bereaved widow had built this chapel on the spot.

"Perhaps out of gratitude?" suggested Gyuri.

"Don't be so horrid," exclaimed Veronica.

The Liskovina Wood is quite like a park, with the exception that there is not much variety in the way of trees, the birch, the favorite tree of the Slovaks, being predominant. But of flowers there were any amount. The ferns grew to a great height, the Anthoxantum had flowered, and in its withered state filled the whole wood with its perfume. Among plants, as among people, there are some which are only pleasant and agreeable

St. Peter's Umbrella

to others after their death. What a difference there is in the various kinds of plants! There is the gladiolus, the most important part of which is the bulb it hides under the earth; whoever eats it dreams of the future.

Much simpler is the ox-eye daisy, for it will tell you without any ceremonies if the person you are thinking of loves you very much, a little, or not at all; you have only to pull off its snow-white petals one by one, and the last one tells you the truth.

The wild pink provides food for the bee, the lily serves as a drinking-cup for the birds, the large dandelion is the see-saw of the butterflies. For the Liskovina woods are generous, and provide beds for all kinds of insects, strawberries for children, nosegays for young girls, herbs for old women, and the poisonous aconite, which the peasants in that part called the "Wolf-killer."

Whether it ever caused the death of a wolf is doubtful, for wolves have their fair share of sense, and probably, knowing something of botany, they tell their cubs: "Don't touch the *Aconitum Lycotinum*, children; it is better to eat meat."

It was delightful driving in the shady woods, though Madame Krisbay was alarmed each time a squirrel ran up a tree, and was in constant fear of the robbers who had killed the rich innkeeper.

"Why, that was eighty years ago, madame!"

"Well, and their sons?"

Maria Czobor's Rose

She was restless till they had got clear of the wood and had come to a large barren plain, with here and there a small patch of oats, stunted in their growth.

But after that they came to another wood, the far-famed "Zelena Hruska," in the shape of a pear. Supposing robbers were to turn up there!

And Gyuri was just wishing for their appearance while madame was thinking with horror of them. As he sat face to face with the girl, he decided to marry her—because of the umbrella. The girl was certainly pretty, but even had she not been so, the umbrella was worth the sacrifice. St. Peter had told him what to do, and he would follow his advice. Superstition, at which he had laughed the day before, had taken possession of him, and made a place for itself among his more rational thoughts. He felt some invisible power pushing him on to take this step. What power was it? Probably St. Peter, who had advised him in his dream to take it. But how was he to set to work? That was what was troubling him the whole time. How convenient it would be if there were some romance nowadays, as in olden times or in novels; for instance, if robbers were now to appear on the scene, and he could shoot them down one after the other with his revolver, and so free Veronica, who would then turn to him and say:

St. Peter's Umbrella

"I am yours till death!"

But as matters were at present, he did not dare to take any steps in the right direction; the words he had so well prepared seemed to stick in his throat. Doubts arose in his mind; supposing she had not taken a fancy to him! Supposing she were already in love! She must have seen other men besides himself, and if so, they *must* have fallen in love with her. Something ought to happen to help matters on a little.

But no robbers came, there probably were none; it was a poor neighborhood, nothing grew there, not even a robber.

After they had passed the wood, they saw an old castle among the trees, on the top of a hill. It was the Castle of Slatina, had formerly belonged to the Czobors, and was now the property of the Princes of Coburg.

They had to stop at an inn to feed the horses, and Veronica proposed their going to look at the castle, of which an old man had charge; he would show them over it. The innkeeper assured them some of the rooms were just as the Czobors had left them; in the court were a few old cannon, and in the house a collection of curious old armor, and some very interesting family portraits, among them that of a little girl, Katalin Czobor, who had disappeared from her home at the age of seven. Veronica was very interested in the child.

Maria Czobor's Rose

"And what happened to her?" she asked.

"The poor child has never turned up to this day!" sighed the innkeeper.

"And when was it she disappeared?"

"About three hundred years ago," he answered with a smile, and then accompanied his guests up the mountain path that led to the castle.

They were silent on their return, only Madame Krisbay remarking:

"What a mouldy smell there was in there!"

Veronica had caught sight of a beautiful rose on a large bush near the half-ruined walls of the bastion.

"What an exquisite flower!" she exclaimed.

The old caretaker had a legend about that too. From this spot beautiful Maria Czobor had sprung from the walls, and thrown herself down the precipice, for her father wished her to marry an officer in the Emperor's army, and she was in love with a shepherd. The latter had planted a rose-bush on this spot, and every year it bore one single blossom. Gyuri dropped behind the others, and begged the old man to give him the rose.

"My dear sir, what are you thinking of? Why, the poor girl's spirit would haunt me if I were to do such a thing!"

Gyuri took out his purse and pressed two silver florins into the man's hand, upon which, without

St. Peter's Umbrella

further ado, he took out his knife and cut the rose.

"Won't the young lady's spirit haunt you now?" asked Gyuri, smiling.

"No, because with part of the money I will have a Mass said for the repose of her soul."

Gyuri ran after the ladies with the rose in his hand, and offered it to Veronica.

"Here is Maria Czobor's rose," he said. "Will you give me your pink in exchange?"

But she put her hands behind her back, and said coldly:

"How could you have the heart to pick it?"

"I did it for your sake. Will you not exchange?"

"No; I would not for the world wear that flower; I should think I had stolen it from that poor girl."

"Will you really not accept it?"

"No!"

Gyuri threw the rose away, and it rolled down the hillside in the dust and dirt.

Veronica gazed pityingly after the flower as long as it was visible, then turned angrily to Gyuri.

"Is that the way to treat a flower? Had it hurt you in any way?"

"Yes," answered the lawyer shortly.

"Did it prick you?"

Maria Czobor's Rose

"It informed me of a very unpleasant fact."

"What was it?"

"It whispered the continuation of my last night's dream to me."

"What a little chatterbox!"

She turned her big eyes upon Gyuri and spoke in a jesting tone.

"I should have had a refusal!"

Veronica threw back her head, and turned her eyes toward heaven.

"Poor Mr. Wibra!" she exclaimed. "What misfortune to be refused in a dream!"

"Pray go on, make as much fun of it as you like," he said bitterly.

"And are you sure you would have been refused?"

"Yes, now I am sure of it," he answered sadly. "You might guess now of whom I dreamed."

"Of me?" she asked surprised, and the smile died away on her lips. "Of me?" she stammered again, then was silent, descending the hill quietly in madame's wake with bent head. She had lifted the skirt of her dress a little to prevent its dragging in the dust, and her little feet were partly visible as she tripped along with regular steps, treading on the grass and flowers, which, however, were not crushed by her footsteps, but rose again as she passed on.

A tiny lizard crossed their path, its beautiful

St. Peter's Umbrella

colors shining in the sunlight. But what a sad fate befell it! Just at that moment a giant (well known in Besztercebánya) came that way, murmuring: "Why should it live?" and bringing down a heavy heel severed the poor lizard's head from its body.

Veronica just then turned round, and saw the cruel action; she felt inclined to cry over the poor lizard, but did not dare to say anything, for she herself began to be afraid of this Goliath, so she only murmured under her breath: "Wretch!"

When they were farther down the hill she saw before her the rose he had thrown away; there it lay, dirty and dusty, among the stones by the roadside, and, obeying a sudden impulse, she bent and picked it up, blowing the dust off its rosy petals, and then she placed it in the bosom of her dress, where it seemed as though it were in its right place at last. She did not say a word, nor did she look at that dreadful Goliath, but turned away her head, so that he could not see her face. But Goliath was quite satisfied at seeing the rose where he had wished it to be, and out of gratitude would have liked to restore the lizard to life, but that was of course impossible.

At the foot of the hill the carriage was waiting, and the travellers took their places again, this time with an uncomfortable feeling. Silently they sat opposite each other, one looking to the right, the

Maria Czobor's Rose

other to the left, and if their eyes happened to meet they hastily turned them away. When they spoke, their remarks were addressed to Madame Krisbay, who began to notice that something had happened.

But what? Only a few childish words to which their minds had given a more serious meaning than they were meant to have, and had increased in size as once the professor's narrow cell in Hatvan, which the devil enlarged to such an extent that the whole town had place in it. Well, in those few words, everything was contained.

But now something else happened. I don't know how it was, but I think a pin dropped, and at the same moment Veronica bent down as though to look for it. In doing so the pink fell out of her hair into Gyuri's lap, and he picked it up in order to return it to her. But she made him a sign to keep it.

"If it *would* not stay in my hair, and fell into your lap, you may as well keep it."

Would it not have stayed in her hair? Was it quite an accident? thought Gyuri, as he smelt the flower. What a pleasant odor it had! Was it from her hair?

Now they were driving beside the Brána, the far-famed Brána, which quite shuts this part of the country off from the rest of the world, like an immense gate. That is why it is called the

St. Peter's Umbrella

Brána, or gate. It is no common mountain, but an aristocrat among its kind, and in fine weather it wears a hat, for its summit is hidden in clouds. Several small streams make their way down its side, flowing together at the foot, and making one broad stream.

"That is the Bjela Voda," explained Veronica to Madame Krisbay, "we are not far from home now."

They still had to drive through one wood, and then the little white cottages of Glogova would be before them. But this was the worst bit of the road, crooked and curved, full of ruts and rocks, and so narrow that there was hardly room for the carriage to pass.

János turned round and said with a shake of his head:

"The king himself would grow crooked here!"

"Take care, János, that you don't upset us!"

János got down from his seat, and fastened one of the wheels firmly, for there was no brake to the carriage; and now the horses had to move at a funeral pace, and sometimes the road was so narrow between two hills that they could see nothing but the blue sky above them.

"This place is only fit for birds," muttered János.

"Don't you like this part of the country?"

"It is like a pock-marked face," he replied.

Maria Czobor's Rose

"It is not the sort of place one would come to to choose a wife."

Gyuri started. Had the man discovered his intentions?

"Why do you think so?"

"My last master, the baron (János had been at some baron's before in Sáros county), used to say to his sons, and he was a clever man too, 'Never look for a wife in a place where there are neither gnats, good air, nor mineral springs!'"

At this both Veronica and Gyuri were obliged to laugh.

"That's a real Sáros way of looking at things. But, you see, you have vexed this young lady."

"According to your theory I shall have to be an old maid!" said Veronica.

But János vigorously denied the possibility of such a thing.

"Why, dear me, that is not likely; why . . . you . . ."

He wanted to say something complimentary, but could not find suitable words, and as chance would have it, his next words were nearer to swearing than to a compliment, for the shaft of the carriage broke. The ladies were alarmed, and Gyuri jumped down from his seat to see the extent of the damage done. It was bad enough, for it had broken off just near the base.

"What are we to do now?" exclaimed János.

St. Peter's Umbrella

"I said this place was only fit for birds, who neither walk nor drive."

"Oh, that is nothing serious," said Gyuri, who at that moment was not to be put out by a shaft, nor by a hundred shafts.

"Give me your axe, and you go and hold the horses. I'll soon bring you something to fasten the shaft to, and strengthen it."

He took the axe out of the tool-box under the coachman's seat, said a few words to reassure the ladies, and then jumped the ditch by the side of the road.

There were some trees there, but they were as rare as the hairs on the head of an old man. First came a birch, then a hazelnut bush, then a black-thorn, then a bare piece of ground without any trees, and then again a few old trees. So it was rather difficult to find a suitable tree; one was too big, another too small; so Gyuri went on and on in search of one, and got so far that soon the carriage was out of sight, and only Veronica's red sunshade was to be seen in the distance, like a large mushroom. At length his eyes fell on a young birch, which grew near to a small precipice. It was too big for a seedling and too small for a tree, but well-grown and promising. All the same it must be sacrificed, and down came the axe.

But hardly had two or three blows been struck, when a voice was heard, crying out:

Maria Czobor's Rose

“ Reta! Reta!” (Help! Help!)

Gyuri started and turned round. Who had called? The voice seemed quite close, but no one was visible far and near.

Again the call for help was repeated, and now it seemed to come out of the earth, and Gyuri immediately concluded it came from the precipice, and ran toward it.

“ Here I am!” he called out. “ Where are you and what is the matter?”

“ I am down the precipice,” was the answer; “ help me, for God's sake!”

Gyuri looked down, and saw a figure there in a black coat, but he could not see much of it, for it would have been dangerous to have gone too near to the edge.

“ How did you manage to get down there?”

“ I fell in yesterday evening,” answered the man in the black coat.

“ What! Yesterday evening! And can't you get out?”

“ It is impossible, for there is nothing to hold on to, and if I catch hold of any projecting bits, they give way, and I fall back with them.”

“ You are in a bad way altogether! And has no one passed here since then?”

“ No one comes this way. I was prepared for the worst when I heard the sound of blows in the neighborhood. Thank God you came! Help

St. Peter's Umbrella

me if you can, good man, whoever you may be, and I will reward you!"

"I will help you of course with the greatest pleasure, but I must think first how to manage it. If I let down the trunk of a small tree could you climb up it?"

"I am very weak from want of sleep and from hunger," answered the man, his voice getting weaker from shouting.

"Poor fellow! Wait a moment!"

He had suddenly remembered the apples Mrs. Mravucsán had put in his pockets that morning.

"Hallo, there! Look out! I am going to throw down a few apples to go on with while I think over what I am to do."

He took the apples out of his pockets, and rolled them down one after the other.

All of a sudden he remembered that Veronica's was among them. Supposing she were vexed at his giving it away!

"Have you got them?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Please don't eat the red one, it is not mine."

"Very well, I will not eat it."

"You seem to be of the better class?"

"I am the parish priest of Glogova."

Gyuri, surprised, fell a step backward. How strange! The parish priest of Glogova! Could anything more unexpected have happened?

Maria Czobor's Rose

"I will get you out, your reverence; only wait a few minutes."

Back he ran to the carriage, which was waiting in the valley below. From this point the country round about looked like the inside of a poppy head cut in two. He did not go quite up to the carriage, but as soon as he was within speaking distance, shouted at the top of his voice to János:

"Take the harness off the horses, and bring it here to me; but first tie the horses to a tree."

János obeyed, grumbling and shaking his head. He could not make out what his master needed the harness for. He had once heard a wonderful tale of olden times, in which a certain Fatépö Gábor (tree-felling Gábor) had harnessed two bears to a cart in a forest. Could Gyuri be going to do the same?

But whatever it was wanted for, he did as his master told him, and followed him to the precipice. Here they fastened the various straps together, and let them down.

"Catch hold of them, your reverence," called out Gyuri, "and we will pull you up."

The priest did as Gyuri said, but even then it was hard work to get him up, for the ground kept giving way under his feet; however, at length they managed it.

But what a state he was in, covered with dirt and dust; on his face traces of the awful night he

St. Peter's Umbrella

had passed, sleepless and despairing, suffering the pangs of hunger. He hardly looked like a human being, and we (that is, my readers and I) who knew him years before would have looked in vain for the handsome, youthful face we remember. He was an elderly man now, with streaks of gray in his chestnut hair. Only the pleasant, amiable expression in his thin face was the same. He was surprised to see such a well-dressed young man before him—a rarity on the borders of the Glogova woods.

“How can I show you my gratitude?” he exclaimed, with a certain pathos which reminded one strongly of the pulpit.

He took a few steps in the direction of the stream, intending to wash his hands and face, but he stumbled and felt a sharp pain in his back.

“I must have hurt myself last night, when I fell, I cannot walk very well.”

“Lean on me, your reverence,” said Gyuri. “Luckily my carriage is not far off. János, you go on cutting down that tree, while we walk slowly on.”

They certainly did go slowly, for the priest could hardly lift his left foot, and frequently stumbled over the roots of trees. The carriage was some way off, so they had plenty of time for conversation, and every now and then they sat down to rest on the trunk of a fallen tree.

Maria Czobor's Rose

"Tell me, your reverence, how did you come to be in this part of the country late at night?"

And then the priest related how he had expected his sister home yesterday, who had gone to meet her governess. As time went on, and there were no signs of them, he began to feel anxious, and toward evening became so restless that he did as he had often done before, and walked to the borders of the little wood. He walked on and on, finding the way by keeping his eye on the hills on both sides, and listened for the sounds of wheels in the distance. All at once it occurred to him that they might have gone round by the Pribalszky mill, which was a longer but prettier way to Glogova, and Veronica, his sister, was fond of the shade there. Of course that was what they had done, and they must have arrived at home long ago while he was looking for them. So the best way was to turn back at once, and in order to get home as soon as possible, he unfortunately struck across a side path. In his haste he must have stepped too near to the edge of the precipice and had fallen in.

"My poor little sister!" he sighed. "How anxious she must be about me!"

Gyuri would have liked to turn the priest's sorrow into joy.

"We will soon reassure the young lady, and your reverence will feel all right after a night's

St. Peter's Umbrella

rest. In two or three days it will seem like an amusing incident."

"But which might have ended in a horrible death if Divine Providence had not sent you to help me."

"It really does seem as though Divine Providence had something to do with it. The shaft of my carriage broke, or I should never have come near that precipice."

"If I live to be a hundred I shall never forget your kindness to me, and your name will always have a place in my prayers. But how thoughtless of me! I have not even asked you your name yet."

"Gyuri Wibra."

"The well-known lawyer of Besztercebánya? And so young! I am glad to make the acquaintance of such an honorable man, sir, who is beloved in the whole of Besztercebánya; but I should be much more pleased if a poor man now stood before me, to whom I could give a suitable reward. But how am I to prove my gratitude to you? There is nothing I possess which you would accept."

A smile played around Gyuri's mouth.

"I am not so sure of that. You know we lawyers are very grasping."

"Is there really something, or are you joking?"

Maria Czobor's Rose

The lawyer did not answer immediately, but walked on a few steps toward an old wild pear-tree, which had been struck by lightning, and not far from which the carriage was standing.

"Well, yes," he answered then, slowly, almost in a trembling voice, "there is something I would gladly accept from you."

"And what is it?"

"It has just struck me that there is something in my carriage which you might give me."

"In your carriage?"

"Yes, something you do not know of yet, and which I should be very happy to possess."

The priest took him by the hand.

"Whatever it may be, it is yours!"

In another minute they had reached the pear-tree.

"There is my carriage."

The priest looked that way, and saw, first a red sunshade, then a black straw hat under it, with some white daisies in it, and beneath it a sweet, girlish face. It all seemed so familiar to him, the sunshade, the hat, and the face. He rubbed his eyes as though awaking from a dream, and then exclaimed, catching hold of the lawyer's arm:

"Why, that is my Veronica!"

The lawyer smiled quietly and bowed.

"That is," went on the priest in his kind, gentle

St. Peter's Umbrella

voice, "for the future she is your Veronica, if you wish."

By this time Veronica had seen and recognized her brother, had jumped out of the carriage and run to meet him, calling out:

"Here we are, safe and sound. How anxious you must have been! And our carriage is broken to bits; and oh! if you had only seen the horses! All sorts of things have happened, and I have brought Madame Krisbay."

The priest embraced her, and was glad she seemed to know nothing of his accident. How sensible of Gyuri not to have mentioned it!

"Yes, yes, my darling, you shall tell me everything in order later on."

But Veronica wanted to tell everything at once, the carriage accident in Bábaszék, the supper at Mravucsáns' (oh, yes! she had nearly forgotten, Mr. Mravucsán had sent his kind regards), then to-day's journey, the loss of her earring and its recovery . . .

The priest, who was slowly beginning to understand things, here broke in upon her recital.

"And did you give the finder of it a reward?"

She was silent at first at the unexpected question, then answered hurriedly:

"No, of course not, how can you think of such a thing? What was I to give? Besides, he would not accept anything."

Maria Czobor's Rose

"I am surprised at that, for he has since then applied to me for a reward."

"Impossible!" said Veronica, casting a side-glance at Gyuri. Strange doubts had arisen in her mind, and her heart began to beat.

"And what does he ask for?" she asked in a low voice.

"He wants a good deal. He asks for the earring he found, and with it its owner. And I have promised him both!"

Veronica bent her head; her face was suffused with burning blushes, her bosom heaved.

"Well? Do you give no answer? Did I do right to promise, Veronica?"

Gyuri took a step toward her, and said, in a low, pleading voice:

"Only one word, Miss Veronica!" then stood back under the shade of the pear-tree.

"Oh! I am so ashamed!" said Veronica trembling, and bursting into tears.

A breeze came up just then across the Brána, and shook the pear-tree, which shed its white petals, probably the last the old tree would bear, over Veronica's dress.

CHAPTER II.

THREE SPARKS.

MADAME sits in the carriage, and can understand nothing of what is going on. The young lady entrusted to her charge springs out of the carriage, runs up to a strange man in a long black coat, throws her arms round his neck, and then they all begin to talk with excited gestures, standing under the pear-tree. Then her pupil comes back to the carriage, mild as a lamb, arm in arm with the young man who had found her earring yesterday. All of this is so unexpected, so surprising. And while they are mending the broken shaft and reharnessing the horses, the man in the black coat, who turns out to be the girl's brother, turns to her and whispers in her ear:

“Your pupil has just engaged herself!”

Good gracious! When and where? Why, now, under the tree! Ah, Madame Krisbay, you feel you ought to faint now, partly because you are a correct woman, and consequently horrified at the way the event has taken place, and partly because you have fallen among such strange peo-

Three Sparks

ple; but your bottle of Eau de Cologne is quite at the bottom of your travelling-bag, and so it will be better not to faint now. But it is very shocking all the same! For though a tree is suitable for flirting under, or for declarations of love, it is not the correct place to ask a parent or guardian for a girl's hand. The proper place for that (especially in novels) is a well-furnished drawing-room. If the girl is very shy she runs out of the room; if not very shy she falls on her knees and asks the blessing of her parents or guardian, as the case may be. But how is one to kneel under a tree? These were the thoughts that were troubling Madame Krisbay, not Veronica. She, on the contrary, was thinking that one fine day she would return to this spot with her sketch-book, and draw the old tree as a souvenir.

All this time the carriage was rolling along the dusty road. There was no room for the coachman, so he had to follow on foot, and Gyuri took the reins into his own hands, Veronica sitting on the box beside him. Oh dear! she thought, what would they think of her in the village as they drove through?

The road was better now, and they could drive faster, so Gyuri loosened the reins, and began to think over the events that had taken place. Was it a dream or not? No, it could not be, for there was Veronica sitting near to him, and behind him

St. Peter's Umbrella

Father János was talking to Madame Krisbay in the language of the Gauls. No, it was simple truth, though it seemed stranger than fiction. Who would have believed yesterday that before the sun set twice he would find his inheritance, and a wife into the bargain? Twenty-four hours ago he had not known of the existence of Miss Veronica Bélyi. Strange! And now he was trying to imagine what the world had been like without her. It seemed impossible that he had not felt the want of her yesterday. But the wheels were making such a noise, that he found it difficult to collect his thoughts. Wonders had happened. One legend, that of the umbrella, was done away with, but on its ruins another had built itself up. Heaven and earth had combined to help him to his inheritance. Heaven had sent a dream and earth a protector.

His heart swelled as he thought of it. Oh, if the girl next him only knew to what a rich man she had promised her hand!

After passing the Kopanyicza Hills, which seem like a screen to the entrance of the valley, Glogova, with its little white houses, lay before them.

"We are nearly at home now," said Veronica.

"Where is the Presbytery?" asked Gyuri.

"At the end of the village."

"Tell me when to turn to the right or the left."

Three Sparks

“Very well, Mr. Coachman! At present keep straight on.”

A smell of lavender pervaded the street, and the tidy little gardens were filled with all sorts of flowers. In front of the houses children were playing, and in most of the courtyards a foal was running about, with a bell tied round its neck. Otherwise the village seemed quite deserted, for all who could work were out in the fields, and the women, having cooked the dinner at home, had carried it out to their husbands. Only on the grass-plot in front of the school-house was there life; there the children were at play, and their greetings to those in the carriage was in Hungarian.

Of the villagers only the “aristocratic” were at home. At the threshold of a pretty little stone house stood Gongoly, much stouter than some years before. In front of the smithy sat Klinc-sok, quietly smoking, while the smith mended a wheel.

“Hallo!” he called out. “So you’ve come back! Why, we were thinking of looking out for another priest!” Which showed that Father János’ absence had been noticed.

How Glogova had changed in the last few years! There was a tower to the church, the like of which was not to be seen except in Losoncz; only that on the tower of Losoncz there was a

St. Peter's Umbrella

weathercock. In the middle of the village was a hotel, "The Miraculous Umbrella," with Virginian creeper climbing all over it, and near it a pretty little white house, looking as though it were made of sugar; behind it a garden with a lot of young trees in it.

"Whose house is that?" asked Gyuri, turning round.

"The owner is on the box-seat beside you."

"Really? Is it yours, Veronica?"

She nodded her head.

"There is a small farm belonging to it," said Father János modestly.

"Well, we won't take it with us, but leave it here for your brother, shall we, Veronica?"

Then he turned to the priest again, saying:

"Veronica has a fortune worthy of a countess, but neither you nor she knows of it."

Both the priest and Veronica were so surprised at this announcement, that they did not notice they were in front of the Presbytery, and Gyuri would have driven on if Visztula, the old watchdog, had not rushed out barking with joy; and old Widow Adamecz called out, with the tears rolling down her face:

"Holy Mary! you have heard the prayers of your servant!"

"Stop! here we are. Open the gate, Mrs. Adamecz."

Three Sparks

The widow wiped away her tears, dropped her book, and got up to open the gate.

“Is dinner ready?” asked Father János.

“Dinner? Of course not. Whom was I to cook for? We all thought your reverence was lost. I have not even lighted the fire, for my tears would only have put it out again.”

“Never mind, Mrs. Adamecz. I feel sure you were anxious on my account, but now go and see about some dinner for us, for we are dying of hunger.”

Veronica had become suspicious at the widow's words, and began to storm her brother with questions; then burst out crying and turned her back upon Gyuri, declaring they were hiding something from her. So they were obliged to tell her the truth, and her poor little heart nearly broke when she thought of what her brother had gone through, and what danger he had been in.

While this was going on, Mrs. Adamecz was bustling about in the kitchen, and giving every one plenty of work to do. Both the maids were called in to help, and the farm-servant too.

“Come and whip this cream, Hanka. And you, Borbála, go and fetch some salt. Is the goose plucked? Now, Mátyás, don't be so lazy, run and pick some parsley in the garden. Dear me! How very thin the good lady is whom Miss Veronica has brought home with her. Did you see

St. Peter's Umbrella

her? I shall have hard work to feed her up and make her decently fat. Give me a saucepan; not that one, the other. And, Borbála, grate me some bread-crumbs. But the young man is handsome. I wonder what he wants here? What did you say? You don't know? Of course you don't know, silly, if I don't. But this much is certain (between ourselves of course), there is something strange in Miss Veronica's eyes. Something has happened, but I can't make out what."

Widow Adamecz thought of all sorts of things, both good and bad, but her cooking was excellent, and she gave them such a dinner, that even the lovers found their appetites.

After dinner, Gyuri sent a man on horseback with a letter to Mr. Sztolarik in Besztercebánya.

"MY DEAR GUARDIAN:

"I have great things to communicate to you, but at present can only write the outlines. I have found the umbrella, partly through Mrs. Müncz, partly by chance. At present I am in Glogova, at the priest's house, whose sister Veronica I have asked in marriage. She is a very pretty girl; besides, there is no way of getting at the money unless I marry her. Please send me by the messenger two gold rings from Samuel Huszák's shop, and

Three Sparks

the certificate of my birth; it must be among your papers somewhere. I should like the banns to be published the day after to-morrow.

“I remain,” etc.

He told the messenger to hurry.

“I’ll hurry, but the horse won’t!”

“Well, use your spurs.”

“So I would, but there are no spurs on sandals!”

The horse was a wretched one, but all the same, next day they heard a carriage stop at the door, and who should get out but Sztolarik himself. Great man though he was, no one was glad to see him except the priest. Veronica felt frightened. She hardly knew why, but it seemed as though a breath of cold air had entered with him. Why had he come here just now?

The old lawyer was very pleasant to her.

“So this is little Veronica?” he asked.

“Yes,” answered Gyuri proudly.

The old gentleman took her small hand in his large one, and pinched her cheek in fatherly fashion. But no amount of pinching would bring the roses back just then. Her heart was heavy with fear. Why, oh, why had he come?

Gyuri was surprised too, for Sztolarik hated to leave his home.

“Have you brought them?” he asked.

St. Peter's Umbrella

"Yes."

Veronica drew a breath of relief, for Gyuri had mentioned that he expected the engagement rings from Besztercebánya.

"Give them to me," he said.

"Later on," answered the old lawyer. "First of all I must speak to you."

He must speak to him first? Then he must have something to say which could not be said after they had exchanged rings! Veronica again felt a weight on her heart. Gyuri got up discontentedly from his place next to Veronica, whose fingers began to play nervously with the work she had in her hands.

"Come across to my room then."

Gyuri's room was at the other end of the house, which was built in the shape of an L. It used to be the schoolroom before the new school was built. (Widow Adamecz had learnt her A B C there.) The priest who had been there before Father János had divided the room into two parts by a nicely painted wooden partition, and of one half he had made a spare bedroom, of the other a store-room.

Veronica was feeling as miserable as she could, and her one wish at that moment was to hear the two gentlemen's conversation, for everything depended on that. Some demon who had evidently never been to school, and had never learned that it

Three Sparks

was dishonorable to listen at doors or walls, whispered to her:

“Run quickly, Veronica, into the storeroom, and if you press your ear to the wall, you will be able to hear what they say.”

Off went Veronica like a shot. It is incredible what an amount of honey a demon of that description can put into his words; he was capable of persuading this well-educated girl to take her place among the pickled cucumbers, basins of lard, and sacks of potatoes, in order to listen to a conversation which was not meant for her ears.

Not a sound was to be heard in the storeroom but the dripping of the fat from a side of bacon hanging from the rafters, and which the great heat there was causing it to melt. Some of it even fell on her pretty dress, but what did she care for that just then?

“So you have found out all about the umbrella,” she heard Sztolarik say, “but have you seen it yet?”

“Why should I?” asked Gyuri. “I cannot touch its contents till after the wedding.”

“Why not sooner?”

“Because, for various reasons, I do not wish the story of the umbrella known.”

“For instance?”

“First of all, because Father János would be the laughing-stock of the place.”

St. Peter's Umbrella

"Why do you trouble your head about the priest?"

"Secondly, because it would give Veronica reason to think I am only marrying her for the sake of the umbrella."

"But she will know it later on in any case."

"I shall never tell her."

"Have you any other reasons?"

"Oh, yes. I dare say they would not even give me the check; it is probably not made out in any particular name; so how am I to prove to them that it is mine? It really belongs to the person who has it in his possession. And perhaps they would not even give me the girl, for if her fortune is as large as we think it, she can find as many husbands as she has fingers on her hands."

Veronica felt giddy. It was as though they were driving nails into her flesh. She could not quite understand all they were talking about—of umbrellas, receipts, large fortunes. What fortune? But this much she had begun to understand, that she was only the means to some end.

"Well, well," began Sztolarik again after a short pause, "the affair seems to be pretty entangled at present, but there is still worse to come."

"What more can come?" asked Gyuri in an uncertain voice.

Three Sparks

“Don’t do anything at present. Let us find out first of all whether you love the girl.”

Poor little Veronica was trembling like a leaf in her hiding-place. She shut her eyes like a criminal before his execution, with a sort of undefined feeling that the blow would be less painful so. What would he answer?

“I think I love her,” answered Gyuri, again in that uncertain voice. “She is so pretty, don’t you think so?”

“Of course. But the question is, would you in other circumstances have asked her to marry you? Answer frankly!”

“I should never have thought of such a thing.”

A sob was heard in the next room, and then a noise as though some pieces of furniture had been thrown down.

Sztolarik listened for a few moments, and then, pointing to the wall, asked:

“Do you know what is on the other side?”

“I think it is the storeroom.”

“I thought I heard some one sob.”

“Perhaps one of the servants saw a mouse!”

And that is how a tragedy looks from the next room when the wall is thin. If there is a thick wall it does not even seem so bad. One of the servants had seen a mouse, or a heart had been broken; for who was to know that despair and fright only have one sound to express them?

St. Peter's Umbrella

Veronica, with her illusions dispersed, ran out into the open air; she wished to hear no more, only to get away from that hated place, for she felt suffocating; away, away, as far as she could go. . . . And this all seemed, from the next room, as though Widow Adamecz or Hanka had seen a mouse. But, however it may have seemed to them, they had forgotten the whole thing in half a minute.

"You say it would never have occurred to you to marry her. So you had better not hurry with the wedding. Let us first see the umbrella and its contents, and then we shall see what is to be done next."

Gyuri went on quietly smoking his cigarette and thought:

"Sztolarik is getting old. Fancy making such a fuss about it!"

"I have thought it well over," he went on aloud, "and there is no other way of managing it; I must marry the girl."

Sztolarik got up from his chair, and came and stood in front of the young man, fixing his eyes on him.

"But supposing you could get at your inheritance without marrying Veronica?"

Gyuri could not help smiling.

"Why, I have just said," he exclaimed impatiently, "that it cannot be done, but even if it

Three Sparks

could, I would not do it, for I feel as though she also had a right to the fortune, as it has been in her possession so long, and Providence seems to have sent it direct to her."

"But supposing you could get at it through Veronica?"

"That seems out of the question too."

"Really? Well, now listen to me, Gyuri, for I have something to tell you."

"I am listening."

But his thoughts were elsewhere, as he drummed on the table with his fingers.

"Well," went on Sztolarik, "when I went in to Huszák's this morning to buy the two rings you wanted sent by the messenger (for I had no intention of coming here myself then), Huszák was not in the shop, so the rabbit-mouthed young man waited on me. You know him?"

Yes, Gyuri remembered him.

"I told him to give me two rings, and he asked whom they were for. So I said they were going a good distance. Then he asked where to, and I told him to Glogova. 'Perhaps to the priest's sister?' he asked. 'Yes,' I said. 'She's a beauty,' he remarked. 'Why, do you know her?' asked I. 'Very well,' he answered."

Gyuri stopped tapping, and jumped up excitedly.

"Did he say anything about Veronica?"

St. Peter's Umbrella

"You shall hear in a minute. While he was wrapping up the rings he went on talking. How had he got to know the priest's sister? 'I was in Glogova last year.' 'And what the devil were you doing in Glogova?' 'Why, the villagers were having a silver handle made here for a wretched-looking old umbrella, which they keep in their church, and the stupid things were afraid to send the umbrella here for fear any one should steal it, though it was not worth twopence; so I was obliged to go there in order to fasten the handle on.'"

"Why, this is dreadful!" exclaimed Gyuri, turning pale.

Sztolarik smiled.

"That is only why I said, my friend, that we had better wait a bit before deciding anything."

"Let us go at once to Father János and ask him to show us the umbrella."

He could not wait a minute longer. He had been so near to his object, and now it was slipping from him again, like a *Fata Morgana*, which lures the wanderer on to look for it.

It was easy to find the priest; he was feeding his pigeons in the garden.

"Father János," began Gyuri, "now Mr. Sztolarik is here he would like to look at your wonderful umbrella. Can we see it?"

"Of course. Mrs. Adamecz," he called out to

Three Sparks

the old woman, who was plucking a fowl at the kitchen door, "will you bring me out the key of the church, please?"

She did as she was asked, and the priest, going on in front, led his visitors through the church.

"This way, gentlemen, into the sacristy."

As they stepped in there it was before them! Pál Gregorics's old umbrella smiled at them, and seemed like an old friend, only the handle, yes, the handle was unknown to them, for it was of silver.

Gyuri gazed at it speechlessly, and felt that the end was near. A demon was behind him, constantly urging him on, and whispering: "Go on, go on, and look for your inheritance!" A second demon ran on before him, beckoning and crying: "Come along, it is this way!"

But there was a third one, the liveliest of all, who followed in the wake of the second one, and each time Gyuri thought he had attained his end, this demon turned round, and laughed in his face, saying: "There is nothing here!"

Sztolarik kept his countenance, and carefully examined the handle of the umbrella, as though he were admiring the work.

"Had it always this same handle?" he asked.

"Oh dear no, this is of real silver, and very finely chased. The jeweller in Besztercebánya made it, and he is quite an artist. Just look at the style, and what taste is displayed in it. My par-

St. Peter's Umbrella

ishioners had it made last summer as a surprise for me while I was away at the baths. The old handle had been broken off, and it was almost impossible to make use of the umbrella. I expect it was Klincsok's idea, for he started the collection. There are still plenty of good Christian hearts to be found."

Then he turned to Gyuri.

"I will introduce you to Klincsok, he is a very worthy man."

Gyuri wished the worthy Klincsok in Jericho, and he could even have found him a companion for the journey, for behind him was the first demon, again whispering: "Go and look for your inheritance!"

"But I suppose they kept the old handle?" he asked.

"I do not think so," answered the priest. "It was only of common wood; I believe Mrs. Adamecz asked Veronica for it."

(It must have been the second demon speaking through the priest: "The handle of the umbrella is in Mrs. Adamecz's possession.")

Sztolarik now became curious too.

"Who is Mrs. Adamecz?" he asked.

"My old cook, who just now brought me the keys."

Mr. Sztolarik burst out laughing, the walls of the empty church re-echoing with the sound.

Three Sparks

When they were outside, and the priest had gone in with the keys, the old lawyer took the two rings out of the paper they were wrapped in and pressed them into Gyuri's palm, saying quaintly:

"According to your logic of half an hour ago, you must now marry old Mrs. Adamecz, so go and ask for her hand at once."

Gyuri gave no answer to this cruel thrust, and went into the kitchen, where the widow was frying pancakes.

"I say, Mrs. Adamecz, where have you put the old handle of the church umbrella?"

Widow Adamecz finished frying her pancake, put it on a wooden platter with those she had already fried, and then turned round to see who was speaking to her.

"What have I done with the old handle, my dear? Well, you see, this is how it was. My little grandson, Matykó, got ill last year just at cabbage-cutting time—no, I believe it was earlier in the year . . ."

"I don't care when it was, only go on."

Widow Adamecz quietly poured some more of the batter into the frying-pan.

"Let me see, what was I saying? Ah, yes, I was speaking of Matykó. Well, it was the result of the staring."

(The peasants think that if a child is much looked at and admired it pines away.)

St. Peter's Umbrella

Gyuri began impatiently to tap with his foot on the floor.

"Will you tell me where it is?"

"It is there under the table."

"What, the handle?"

"No, the child."

Yes, there was Matykó, sitting on a basin turned upside down, a fat-faced, blue-eyed Slovak child, playing with some dried beans, its face still dirty from the pancakes it had eaten.

"Bother you, woman! Are you deaf?" burst out the lawyer. "I asked you about the handle of the umbrella, not about the child."

Mrs. Adamecz tossed her head.

"Well, that's just what I am talking about. I tell you, they persisted in admiring Matykó, and the poor little angel was fading away. There is only one remedy for that; you must take a burning stick, and let three sparks fall from it into a glass of water, and of this the child must drink for three days. I did this, but it was of no use; the child went on suffering and getting thinner from day to day, and my heart nearly broke at the sight of him; for I have a very soft heart, as his reverence will tell you . . ."

"I don't doubt it for a minute, but for heaven's sake answer my question."

"I'm coming to it in a minute, sir. Just at that time they were having the silver handle made

Three Sparks

to the umbrella, and our young lady, pretty dear, gave me the old handle. Why, thought I, that will be just the thing for Matykó; if three sparks from that holy wood are of no use, then Matykó will be entered in the ranks of God's soldiers."

At the thought of little Matykó as one of God's soldiers her tears began to flow. It was lucky if none of them fell into the frying-pan.

"Mrs. Adamecz!" exclaimed Gyuri, alarmed, his voice trembling. "You surely did not burn the handle?"

The old woman looked at him surprised.

"How was I to get the three sparks from it if I did not burn it?"

Gyuri fell back against the wall, the kitchen and everything in it swam before his eyes, the plates and basins seemed to be dancing a waltz together; a tongue of fire arose from the fireplace, bringing with it the third demon, who exclaimed: "There is nothing here!"

But all at once he felt a hand laid on his arm. It was Sztolarik.

"It was, and is no more," he said. "But never mind, Fate intended it to be so. For the future you will not, at all events, run after a shadow, you will be yourself again, and that is worth a good deal, after all."

CHAPTER III.

LITTLE VERONICA IS TAKEN AWAY.

BUT it was of no use Sztolarik preaching about the uselessness of worldly goods, for those worldly goods are very pleasant to have.

When a favorite child dies, the members of the family always pronounce very wise words, which are supposed to comfort one another, such as: "Who knows how the child would have turned out? It might have come to the gallows in time; perhaps it was better it had died now," etc. But for all that, wisdom has never yet dried our tears.

Sztolarik said all he could think of to console Gyuri, but the young lawyer was quite cast down at the thought that his dreams would never now be realized; his whole life was before him, dark and threatening. But the world was the same as of old, and everything went just the same as though Widow Adamecz had never burned the handle of the umbrella.

The hands of the parish clock pointed to the Roman figure II., and the chimes rang out on the

Little Veronica is Taken Away

air; the servants laid the table for dinner, Mrs. Adamecz brought in the soup, and his reverence led his guests into the dining-room, and placed them right and left of Madame Krisbay, when all at once they noticed that Veronica was missing.

“I was just going to ask,” said Madame Krisbay, “if she had been with the gentlemen?”

“I thought she was with you,” said the priest.

“I have not seen her for two hours.”

“Nor I.”

“Nor we.”

“Perhaps she is in the kitchen?”

Madame Krisbay looked vexed, got up from her seat, and went into the kitchen to call her pupil, but returned at once with the remark that she had not been seen there either.

“Where can she be?” exclaimed the priest, and ran out to look for her, sending the servants to some of her favorite seats in the garden, thinking she might have gone there to read, and have forgotten the time.

Mrs. Adamecz grumbled in the kitchen, for the dinner was spoiling.

“Well, serve the dinner,” said Father János, for, of course, he could not keep his guests waiting, especially as Sztolarik wanted to return home as soon as possible.

So the dishes were brought in one after the other, but still there was no sign of Veronica; and

St. Peter's Umbrella

Hanka had returned with the news that no one had seen her.

Gyuri sat in his place, pale and quiet.

"Perhaps she is in the apiary," suggested her brother, "or perhaps" (here he hesitated a minute, not knowing how to continue), "perhaps something unpleasant has taken place between you?"

Gyuri looked up surprised.

"Nothing has taken place between us," he said coldly.

"Then, Hanka, run across to the new house and look in the apiary. Please excuse her, gentlemen, she is such a child still, and follows her own whims. She is probably chasing a butterfly. Take some more wine, Mr. Sztolarik."

He was trying to reassure himself, not his guests, as he sat there listening to every sound, paying scant attention to the conversation, and giving many wrong answers.

Sztolarik asked if the bad weather this year had made much difference to the harvest.

"One or two," answered the priest.

"Have you any other brothers or sisters?"

"I don't know."

His answers showed the perturbed state of his mind, and it was with difficulty he kept his seat at table. At length the old lawyer said:

"Perhaps it would be better if your reverence

Little Veronica is Taken Away

were to go and look for Miss Veronica yourself; and I should be glad if you would send word to my coachman that I wish to start as soon as possible, for it is a long drive to Besztercebánya."

The priest seized the opportunity, and begging Madame Krisbay to excuse him, hurried away, for he found Veronica's absence very strange, and was beginning to get anxious. So, Madame Krisbay having retired, the two gentlemen were left alone, and a painful silence ensued. Gyuri was gazing with melancholy eyes at the canary, which was also silent now.

"You had better order your carriage, too," said Sztolarik, breaking the silence at last. "We could leave at the same time."

Gyuri murmured some unintelligible answer, and shook his head.

"But you will have to leave soon, for our part here is played out."

"I tell you it is impossible."

"Why?"

"Don't you see that Veronica is lost?"

"What does that matter to you? The umbrella handle is lost too."

Gyuri made an impatient gesture.

"What do I care about the umbrella?"

"So it is the girl you want? You told me a different tale before dinner."

Gyuri turned round.

St. Peter's Umbrella

"I did not know then."

"And now you know?"

"Yes, now I know," he answered shortly.

"And may I ask," said Sztolarik, "when did Amor light this flaming fire? for you did not seem to take much interest in the girl before her disappearance."

"And yet it is causing me at the present moment all the tortures of hell. Believe me, my dear guardian, the loss of my inheritance seems to me a trifle beside the loss of Veronica."

Sztolarik was impressed by the apparent sincerity of Gyuri's sorrow.

"That's quite another thing," he said. "If that is how you feel I will stay here with you. Let us go and look for the girl ourselves, and find out what she thinks on the subject."

When they went out, they found great confusion reigning in the courtyard, but Mrs. Adamecz was loudest in her lamentations.

"I knew this would be the end of it. A legend should never be tampered with by a mortal's hand, or it will fall to pieces. Oh, our dear young lady! She was God's bride, and they wanted to make her the bride of a mortal, so God has taken her to Himself."

Sztolarik sprang toward her, and caught hold of her hand.

Little Veronica is Taken Away

“What is that you say? Have you heard anything?”

“Gundros, the cowherd, has just told us that he saw our young lady this morning running straight toward the Bjela Voda, across the meadows, and her eyes were red, as though she had been crying. There is only one conclusion to be drawn from that.”

A lot of women and children were gathered round the kitchen door, and one of them had also seen Veronica earlier than Gundros had.

“Did she look sad?” asked Gyuri.

“She was crying.”

“Oh dear!” exclaimed Gyuri despairingly.

“We will look for her,” Sztolarik assured him.

“Where?”

“Out in the meadows or in the village, for it is certain she must be somewhere about, and we shall soon know where.”

“That will not be so easy,” sighed Gyuri, “for we have no glass to show us things, as they have in fairy-tales.”

“I’ll have the whole village round us in a few minutes.”

Gyuri shook his head doubtfully. Had Sztolarik gone mad to think he could call all the people together from the fields, from the woods, from everywhere round about? But the old lawyer

St. Peter's Umbrella

was as good as his word. Veronica must be found at any cost.

"Where is his reverence?" he asked of the bystanders.

"He has gone to the pond where the hemp is soaked, to see if the young lady has fallen in there."

"Where is the bell-ringer?"

"Here I am, sir."

"Go up at once into the tower, and ring the big bell."

"But there is no fire!"

"That does not matter. If I order it to be done, you must do it. Do you know me?"

Of course he knew Mr. Sztolarik, who had often been to Glogova since he had been made President of the Courts. So off ran Pál Kvapka, and in a few minutes the big fire-bell was tolling. There was no wind, and the sound was carried for miles around over the meadows, into the woods, over the mountains, and soon the people came running up from every side. It was astonishing how soon the villagers were assembled round the Presbytery. Those who saw it will never see its like again, until the Archangel Gabriel sounds his trumpet at the last day.

Sztolarik gazed placidly at the crowd assembled around him.

"Now," he said, "I have only to stand up in

Little Veronica is Taken Away

their midst and ask them if any of them have seen Veronica. But it will be quite unnecessary, for Veronica herself will soon be here. Look out of the window," he called up to the bell-ringer, "and tell me if you can see the young lady."

"Yes, I can see her, she is running through the Srankós' maize-field."

"She lives!" exclaimed Gyuri ecstatically, but his joy was soon at an end, for he thought: "If there is nothing the matter with her she must have run away from me."

And he began to wonder if it would not have been better if she were dead, for then he could have believed she loved him, and could have loved her and sorrowed for her.

The bell-ringer still went on tolling the bell, so Sztolarik called up to him:

"Stop tolling, you fool, can't you? Show us which way the Srankós' maize-field lies."

The bell-ringer pointed to the right.

"You run on in front, Gyuri, and try and get out of her what is the matter with her."

But Gyuri was already gone, through the priest's garden, across Magát's clover-field, and his heart began to beat, for from there he could see Veronica in her green dress, without a hat, only a little red silk shawl round her shoulders. Across Szlávik's corn-field, then into Gongoly's meadow, and they were face to face.

St. Peter's Umbrella

The girl drew a sobbing breath when she saw him, and began to tremble violently.

"Where is the fire?" she asked.

"Don't be frightened, there is no fire. My guardian had the bell rung so as to make you return home. Why did you run away?"

The girl turned pale, and bit her lip.

"It is enough if I know the reason," she said in a low voice. "Please leave me alone."

And she turned round as though to return to the woods.

"Veronica, for heaven's sake don't torture me; what have I done?"

The girl looked at him coldly, her eyes were like two bits of ice.

"Leave me alone," she said, "what do you want with me?"

The young man caught hold of her hand, and Veronica did her best to free herself from his grasp, but he would not let go her hand till he had forced a ring on to her finger.

"That is what I want," he said.

"That is what you want, is it?" laughed the girl bitterly. "And this is what I want!" And she tore off the ring and threw it away, across the meadow, into the grass. Poor Gyuri fell back a few steps.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "why did you do it? Why?"

Little Veronica is Taken Away

“Do not try to deceive me any longer, Mr. Wibra. You should not put a ring on my finger, but on the umbrella, for that is what you really want to marry.”

Gyuri began to understand what had taken place.

“Good heavens! You listened to our conversation!”

“Yes, I know all!” said Veronica, blushing slightly. “It is no good your denying it.”

“I don’t wish to deny anything. But listen to me, please.”

They walked quietly through the meadow, Gyuri talking, the girl listening, while the thousands of insects which peopled the fields flew away before their feet. Gyuri related the story of his life, and of his father’s, of the supposed inheritance, of his search for it, and how he had gathered the threads together till they led him to Bábaszék. The girl listened to him, first with reproach in her eyes, then as judge, trying to find out the truth, and as the story began to interest her more and more, she became quite excited. Now she was neither plaintiff nor judge, only an interested listener, surprised that the threads led nearer and nearer to herself. Now Gyuri is speaking of Mrs. Müncz’s son, now Móricz is telling his story, which shows that the umbrella must be in Glogova. Then the forester’s wife

St. Peter's Umbrella

tells the tale of St. Peter's bringing the umbrella to the orphan child. A few more words and the story was complete.

Veronica knew all, and her eyes were swimming in tears.

"Oh, dear, how dreadful! Mrs. Adamecz burned the handle!"

"God bless her for it!" said Gyuri brightly, seeing the girl's depression, "for now at least I can prove to you that I love you for yourself alone."

Veronica had taken off the small red shawl and was swinging it in her hand. Suddenly she caught hold of Gyuri's arm, and smiled at him through her tears.

"Do you really mean that you still want to marry me?"

"Of course. What do you say to it?"

"I say that . . ." She ceased speaking, for there was a queer feeling in her throat.

"Well?"

"That you are very volatile, and . . ."

"And?"

"And that . . . Let us run back and look for my ring."

With that she turned, and ran as fast as she could to the part of the meadow in which they had been standing when she threw the ring away. Gyuri could hardly keep up with her.

Little Veronica is Taken Away

They looked for the ring a long time, but it was not to be found. And soon Father János appeared on the scene.

"I say, Gyuri, don't say anything about the umbrella to my brother."

"No, my darling, I will never mention it."

His reverence gave Veronica a good scolding.

"You naughty girl! Is that the way to behave? How you frightened us! Of course you were chasing a butterfly?"

"No, I was running away from one, but it caught me."

"What, the butterfly?"

"Yes, that ugly, big butterfly standing beside you."

His reverence understood as much as he was meant to, and set to work, too, to look for the ring. But they might have looked for it till Doomsday if Mr. Gongoly had not passed that way. Veronica had quite despaired of finding the ring.

"Well, well, my dear," said the nabob of Glo-gova, shaking back his long gray hair, "never mind, trust in Gongoly, he will find it for you. There is only one way to do it, so in an hour's time they will be making hay in this field."

* * * * *

Though the grass was not two inches high (it had only been cut a fortnight before), Mr. Gongoly sent his men there to mow it, with the result

St. Peter's Umbrella

that next day the ring was safely resting on Veronica's finger. And for years the people spoke of the wonderful fact that in that year Mr. Gongoly's meadow gave two crops of hay, and it was always mentioned if any one spoke disparagingly of the Glogova fields.

What more am I to say? I think I have told my story conscientiously. All the same there are some things that will never be known for certain; for instance, what really became of Pál Gregorics' fortune, for there is no sign of it to this day. Was the supposed receipt in the handle of the umbrella or not? No one will ever know, not even little Matykó, who drank the water with three sparks in it. No king drinks such precious liquid as he did—if the story be true.

The legend of the holy umbrella is still believed in in those parts. Mr. Sztolarik, who was fond of a gossip, certainly told his version of the story, how old Müncz the Jew had made a present to Christianity of a holy relic, and so on; but the old belief was strongly rooted, and he was only laughed at when he told his tale. And after all, there was something mystic and strange in the whole affair, and the umbrella had brought worldly goods to every one, Gyuri included, for it had given him the dearest little wife in the world. They were married very soon and never had such

Little Veronica is Taken Away

a wedding taken place in Glogova before. According to Veronica's special wish, every one who had been at the Mravucsáns' supper was invited to the wedding, for she wanted all those who had been present at their first meeting to take part in their happiness. There were a lot of guests from Besztercebánya too, among them the mother of the bridegroom, in a black silk dress, the President of the Courts, the mayor, and lots of others. Then there were the Urszinyis from Kopanyica, two young ladies from Lehota in pink dresses, and Mrs. Müncz from Bábaszék, with lovely golden earrings on.

There were so many different kinds of conveyances in Glogova that day, it would have taken a week to look at them all.

Dear me, what a lovely procession it was too; the peasants stood and gazed open-mouthed at all the people in their beautiful dresses, but most of all at the bride, who walked at the head of the procession in a lovely white dress with a long veil and a wreath of orange-blossoms. Oh, how pretty she was!

But the bridegroom was splendid too, in the same kind of dress in which the king has his portrait painted sometimes. His sword, in a velvet sheath mounted in gold, clattered on the pavement as he walked up the church.

They stood in a semicircle round the altar, each

St. Peter's Umbrella

lady with a nosegay of flowers in her hand, and perfumed to such an extent that the church smelled like a perfumer's shop.

It was a little cool in the church, and the young ladies from Lehota were seen to shiver now and then in their thin pink dresses; but everything went off very well.

The bridegroom spoke his "yes" in a loud, firm voice, the walls seemed to re-echo it, but the bride spoke it almost in a whisper, it sounded like the buzzing of a fly.

Poor child! She got so nervous toward the end of the ceremony that she began to cry. Then she looked for her handkerchief, but was there ever a pocket in a wedding dress? She could not find it, so some one from behind offered her one, then turned and said:

"Button up your coat, Wladin!"

THE END.

BY MAURUS JÓKAI

THE LION OF JANINA ; Or, The Last Days of the Janissaries. A Turkish Novel. Translated by R. NISBET BAIN. 16mo, Cloth, Ornamental, \$1 25.

It is a fascinating story, this of Ali Pasha, for those who are sensitive to the fascination of colossal crime done on—shall we say—the heroic scale. But “The Lion of Janina” is not a novel, and as such it were folly to criticise it. It is a brilliant and lurid series of pictures drawn by a great master’s hand. It is redolent of the East, its color, its fire, its fury, its fatal allurements. Its very incoherence is characteristic. Maurus Jókai never niggles and worries his canvas. He paints with a big brush, with a masculinity and audacity of touch that rivals Rubens. He has imagination, he has vision, he has the great style. To say more of him here were superfluous; to say less were stupid.—*London Chronicle*.


THE GREEN BOOK ; Or, Freedom Under the Snow. A Novel. Translated by Mrs. WAUGH. 16mo, Cloth, Ornamental, \$1 50. (In “The Odd Number Series.”)

Maurus Jókai has compressed within the limits of some five hundred pages as much material as would go to the making of half a dozen interesting and exciting novels. . . . It gives a picture of Russian life and manners that is wonderfully fascinating and complete.—*N. Y. Sun*.

BLACK DIAMONDS. A Novel. Translated by FRANCES A. GERARD. With a Photogravure Portrait of the Author. 16mo, Cloth, Ornamental, \$1 50. (In “The Odd Number Series.”)

Its plot is complicated enough to suit the most exacting admirer of ingenious mystery ; yet the narrative runs as straight as a rifle shot. It has originality in an eminent degree, for two or three of its most remarkable scenes have practically no counterpart in literature.—*Saturday Evening Gazette*, Boston.

HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK AND LONDON

 Any of the above works will be sent by mail, postage prepaid, to any part of the United States, Canada, or Mexico, on receipt of the price.

BY ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

THE CONSPIRATORS. Illustrated. Post
8vo, Cloth, \$1 50.


There is an unmistakable brilliancy about "The Conspirators"; the rollicking spirits of the hero, the man who tells the story, are infectious, and his ardor in love is delightfully romantic.—*Chicago Tribune.*

LORRAINE. Illustrated. Cloth, \$1 25.

Of this novel *The Interior* says: "A more absorbing story could scarcely be imagined; there is no better tale among recent publications than 'Lorraine.'"

HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS

NEW YORK AND LONDON

 Either of the above works will be sent by mail, postage prepaid, to any part of the United States, Canada, or Mexico, on receipt of the price.





LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00022085189

